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Regionalisation and the English Regions

Paul Deacon

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath,

European Studies and Modern Languages

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s, a regional tier of governance has emerged in England, in a country which historically has not been noted for its regional identities.

The vying for European Union (EU) structural funds has been seen as a key factor in the mobilisation of regions across Europe. It is within the context of UK membership of the EU, and the effects of the Europeanisation processes, that some scholars have placed the appearance of English regions.

Other scholars have sought to explain the growth of English regional governance principally in terms of a response to globalisation. New Regionalism offers an insight into the renewed interest in regions as the focus for economic governance in an increasingly globalised world. With its emphasis on clusters, skills and innovation as a way to promote a competitive advantage, links have been made with New Labour's economic agenda.

Economic rescaling, on the other hand, has been seen to offer a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the state and the regions. On this view, the state is actively rescaling economic governance in response to the pressures of globalisation, but at the same time still retains its traditional authority.

The emergence of governance more generally has also been cited as a factor in English regionalisation. The extent to which the state is being "hollowed out" is a feature of this debate. Again, links have been made specifically to New Labour's agenda that included plans for devolution for Scotland and Wales and plans for elected regional assemblies in England.

This thesis examines the East of England and the South West English regions within the context of these debates. The central argument is that regionalisation in England is a centrally orchestrated process by central government as the nature of governance, but not the state, changes.

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Table 1 p79 Taken from Bache and Marshal (2004: 6)

ABBREVIATIONS

ADP	Approved Development Plan
CLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
CLGC	Communities and Local Government Committee
DDMR	Devolving Decision-Making Review
DoE	Department of the Environment
DTER	Department for Transport, Environment and the Regions
DT	Department for Transport
DTI	Department for Trade and Industry
EAGGF	European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund
EEBO	East of England Brussels Office
EEFC	East of England Faiths Council
EEDA	East of England Development Agency
EERA	East of England Regional Assembly
EIBO	Essex International Brussels Office
EiP	Examination in Public
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FIFG	Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GVA	Gross Value Added
GO-East	Government Office East of Englan
GOSW	Government Office South West
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HIP	Housing Improvement Plan
HMT	Her Majesty's Treasury
KTP	Knowledge Transfer Partnership
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LDD	Local Development Document
LDF	Local Development Framework
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
LTP	Local Transport Plan

MLG	Multi-Level Governance
NAU	National Advice Unit
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
RA	Regional Assembly
RCI	Research Councils Institute
RDA	Regional Development Agency
REPB	Regional Economic Planning Board
REPC	Regional Economic Planning Council
RES	Regional Economic Strategy
RHF	Regional Housing Forum
RHS	Regional Housing Strategy
RPB	Regional Planning Board
RPC	Regional Planning Conference
RPG	Regional Planning Guidance
RSS	Regional Spatial Strategy
SCP	Sustainable Communities Plan
SDS	Sustainable Development Strategy
SWSIC	South West Science and Industry Council
SNA	Sub-National Authority
SO	Scottish Office
SRB	Single Regeneration Budget
SHIP	Single Housing Investment Pot
SWCF	South West Council of Faiths
SWRA	South West Regional Strategy
SWRDA	South West Regional Development Strategy
SWUKBO	South West United Kingdom Brussels Office
TWSW	Transport Watch South West
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UAEE	University Association of the East of England

INTRODUCTION

1 Introduction

Giving the appearance of an afterthought, the Conservative leader, David Cameron, said in his speech to the 2007 Conservative Party Conference that ‘while we’re at it, it’s time to abolish those regional assemblies and pass those powers back to the local councils where the power belongs’ (*The Daily Telegraph*, 3 October 2007). The government had, however, announced just such an abolition of the indirectly-elected bodies two and a half months before, shortly after Gordon Brown became Prime Minister (*The Guardian*, 17 July 2007).

This particular announcement, although unexpected, ended any uncertainty there may have been within the English regional landscape following a government defeat in a referendum almost three years before. On 4 November 2004, seventy-eight per cent of voters in the North East had voted decisively against a proposed directly-elected regional assembly: almost four to one. The vote signalled the end, at least for the foreseeable future, of the idea of devolving power to English regions and fully elected regional assemblies – an idea that had become mostly associated with the then Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott over the course of twenty years (*The Guardian* 5 November 2004).

New Labour came to power with a distinctive governance agenda, one that saw Welsh and Scottish devolution, as well as an elected assembly and mayor for London. The seven year period between the election of New Labour in 1997 and the referendum defeat of 2004 saw a significant development in the English regional landscape outside London, as well. The experiment in regional governance within England also comes at a time when ‘regions’ have become the subject of renewed scholarly and political interest, not just within Europe but also in North America (Keating & Loughlin 1997: 1). In England, regions have generally become associated with phenomena such as Europeanisation,

globalisation, the transition from government to governance and ideas on the re-scaling of economic governance. The emergence of an English *regional* tier of governance, of which the regional assemblies were just one part, was perhaps all the more notable because, traditionally, there have not been identifiable regions in England as such, and no demands for regional government (Taylor 1993: 145; Elcock 1997: 429).

Two notable exceptions are the North and Cornwall, and the differences between them are instructive.

The “North” of England is sometimes associated with the demands for English regional government or devolution. In part, this is no doubt based on the “North-South” divide, which ‘remains the most serious form of territorial inequality in the United Kingdom today’ (Morgan 2006: 190), and is summed up in the stereotypical view of a prosperous southern England, and the declining industrial north – a situation only exacerbated by a monetary policy that is more sensitive to the inflationary pressures of the South East at the expense of the northern English regions (Morgan 2006: 191, 192). Key MPs who were and in some cases still are in favour some sort of regional devolution are northern-based MPs – namely, Ed Balls, John Prescott, Richard Caborn, John Healie and the former MP, Joyce Quin. As early as 1991, it was Joyce (now Baroness) Quin’s Private Member’s Motion that called for Regional Government in England (Hansard 1991, 6 Dec., cols. 512-581).

In 1997, MPs from the north of England in particular were reassured that moves towards Scottish and Welsh devolution, and potentially more resources, would be compensated by the establishing of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), in order to help an area of England that faced just as much economic hardship as both Wales and Scotland. They were therefore persuaded not to disrupt the Government’s plans – a lesson learned from earlier attempts to devolve power to Scotland (Mawson 1998: 161, 168; Morgan 2006: 200; see also Chapter 2).

Nevertheless, aside from the occasional demand of political leaders and activists based in the North, there has traditionally been little appetite for a North of England government or for northern separatist movements among the wider population, a lack of interest that least the North shares with most of rest of the England, if nothing else (Sandford 2006a:

79). Even in terms of regional governance, the North is often seen as *three* regions – not one (Taylor 1993: 145). The failure of the referendum in the North East can be seen as a sign of a distinct lack of interest in regional government, just as much as an awareness by the electorate that any ‘economic dividend’ was seen as ‘the political rhetoric as it was’ (Morgan 2006: 200).

This contrasts with Cornwall. Cornwall has its own language, is described as one of six so-called “Celtic nations”, and has a sense of distinctiveness from England that is not shared by any other part of England (Sandford 2006a: 86). The political party, Mebyon Kernow (the ‘Sons of Cornwall’), has been campaigning for devolution for over fifty years (BBC News Online: 18 March 1999), and a petition with fifty thousand signatures – ten per cent of the Cornish population – calling for a directly elected Cornish assembly was handed in to 10 Downing Street in December 2001, shortly before the publication of the Government’s “regions” White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice* (BBC News Online: 12 December 2001). However, two letters written in 2002 from the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to the St Ives MP and recently released under the Freedom of Information Act reveals that, despite acknowledging the strength of feeling for an elected Cornish assembly, and acknowledging the distinctiveness of the Cornish county, the Government had no intention at all of considering a county-based region or a special assembly for Cornwall. It simply did not fit into the Government’s plan for regional devolution (*The Independent*, 8 June 2007).

But why regions? What is it that makes them worthy of any interest at all, let alone the object of Government policy?

There are, in the first place, different ways of dividing England and the UK into regions, outside of politics, for different purposes. We are familiar with, for example, television regions. The BBC considers there to be twelve English regions.¹ These are all different to the regions identified in tourist guidebooks to Britain (to take another example). Although such books have also apparently found it helpful to divide England into regions for foreign visitors, they offer no rationale for defining the regions the way they do, and they vary considerably between guidebooks. Apart from London, the *Rough Guide to Britain* (2000: 67) divides England into nine other regions, seven of which are different

¹See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/england/tvindex.shtml>

from the nine regions that the *Eyewitness Travel Great Britain* (2007: 16-18) also identify outside of London. The two that these guidebooks do agree on, however, also happen to agree with the Government Office regions of the North East and East of England: the Government Office regions being the basis on which the government has decided its English regions. Meanwhile, the *Lonely Planet Country Guide to Great Britain* (2007: 18) opts for ten regions outside of London, but does also agree on the North East. If nothing else, this only underlines that “the region” is not readily recognisable across England as a whole, and points to the lack of “historical” regions in England.

In terms of government policy, I came to the English regions from a European Union (EU) perspective. On the face of it, there seemed to me, in 2002, to be an apparent link between the opening of regional offices in the EU (such as the South West UK Brussels Office), the 1999 redrawing of the European Parliament constituencies to fit those boundaries (Butt Philip 1999: 25) and New Labour’s plans for regional devolution. The integration process had seemed to have stalled following the 2000 Treaty of Nice; but perhaps integration was continuing to occur at the regional level, *below* the national. Indeed, the MEP Joyce Quin wrote that ‘an understanding of the regions of Europe has become increasingly central to an understanding of Europe’ (from Foreward to Wagstaff (ed) 1999: 1) This, then, was the initial inspiration behind my research.

I quickly found that I was not the first to make a *prima facie* link between the “new” regions in England on the one hand, and the EU on the other. Although from a very different perspective to my own, there is a theory (or perhaps more accurately, a conspiracy theory) that the EU is responsible for imposing regions onto the UK in order for the EU to bypass the government in London and rule directly from Brussels. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) has long been a proponent of this view. UKIP’s Deputy Leader, David Campbell Bannerman, in summarising their view recently, asks us to: ‘[c]onsider how powerful the EU-inspired Regional Assemblies / Development Agencies are now [...] The intention is to replace old counties like Kent with regional bodies reporting direct to the Committee of the Regions in Brussels. England is being Balkanised, with its 9 EU regions already taking England’s place on official maps’ (*Kent on Sunday* 11 February 2007).

It was a view that appears to have become more prevalent following the publication of the government's "regions" White Paper, *Your Region Your Choice*, in 2002. Similar views were expressed by Simon Heffer in the *Daily Mail* and Richard Littlejohn in the *Sun* (Tomaney, Hetherington & Humphrey May 2002: 21). Indeed, Christopher Booker, writing in the *Daily Telegraph* (12 May 2002) related how he had found a 1971 European Commission report by Paul Romus (a 'senior French official') that was released under the thirty year rule and which showed the UK divided into regions, although the precise report is not named. However, because John Prescott had a plan for English regions that, by his own admission in the White Paper, went back thirty years, and because this would take us back to the time when Britain was negotiating its entry into the EU, Booker concludes that this is proof that there is a plan:

'...to create a Europe of the Regions, relating directly to Brussels, as a way of breaking up national identities, reducing the power of national governments and promoting a common European identity.'

To substantiate his claims, he helpfully publishes the map. It is one instantly recognisable as depicting the UK Standard Statistical Regions of their day (see Chapter 3): one devised, not by the Commission, but by the UK government some years beforehand. Given that Paul Romus was involved with regional policy², and given that there were discussions at the Commission at the time regarding a European regional funding, particularly with the imminent admission of Britain and Ireland into the then European Economic Community in 1973 (McCormick 2002: 74), then it would seem likely that this report does not detail the "splitting up of England" as such, but relates to a future European regional policy, which of course came to pass in 1975 with the establishing of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Indeed, as Keating (2008: 72) remarks, 'no evidence has ever been produced of a plan to by-pass nation-states and create a Europe of the Regions'.

Nevertheless, that there is a perception that the EU is in someway behind the regionalisation of England is in itself interesting. Apart from an anti-EU agenda, it also appears to demonstrate again the lack of strong regional identities within England, above

² See Biographical Notes, at the European University Institute's Historical Archives of the European Union, at <http://www.warc.eui.eu/ech/bin/CreaInt.asp?rc=INT-ECH783>

the county level. An artificial region itself does not necessarily mean that it cannot become something with which to identify. This tension, between the artificial nature of the English region and identity, is an underlying theme that reoccurs in the thesis.

There are two principal themes dealt with in this thesis: the first of these is Europeanisation and the impact of the EU on English regionalisation; the second relates to New Labour and changes in governance.

This thesis principally seeks to understand why there are now things called “English regions” and considers the various phenomena, such as Europeanisation and others (mentioned above), with which the emergence of these regions has been linked or offered up as an explanation.

It is the main contention of this thesis that central government has been very much in control of the process of English regionalisation, and illustrates the extent to which the state is still in control rather than a weakening of the UK national state, as has sometimes been claimed. English regions in their current form can be seen as a “necessary myth”; necessary because government policy assumes that such regions exist, and a myth because they do not appear to exist anywhere other than in the collective minds of policy-makers and statisticians.

The following chapter continues with a review of the literature, and discussion of the case studies and methodology used.

1. Literature Review

1.1 The region, regionalisation and regionalism

1.1.1 The region

The concept of a “region” can be ambiguous, or ‘rubbery’, as it has been put more recently (Marks, et al., 2008: 113). At one level, it can refer to groups of countries, such as Western Europe or Latin America (Keating & Loughlin 1997: 2). The other sense of the ‘region’ implies that which is below the level of a nation-state, but above the municipal, or local, level. The terms ‘macro-region’ and ‘micro-region’ have been used to express this distinction clearly (Dunning 2000: 7, 22), and in that terminology it is the micro-region that is the object of my interest, although I shall for ease use the word “region”.

This does not actually answer the question of exactly what is a region. An understanding of the difficulty involved is indicated by the European Union’s (EU’s) own Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS). Three levels of region are identified, conveniently described as NUTS I, NUTS II and NUTS III. The NUTS I level includes entire Member States, such as the Republic of Ireland and Denmark, and, in terms of the UK, Wales and Scotland, but not England – England is divided into nine regions. So the NUTS I “regions” vary from Member States; they vary in “level” (from entire Member States at national-level to sub-national areas); the extent to which they are ‘historical’ regions; and in population size. NUTS I may, according to the EU’s criteria, vary in population size between three to seven million.³

The NUTS II level takes the ambiguities further. Broadly in England they reflect the “traditional” English counties, including in some cases areas now have their own unitary authority but otherwise have little or no current administrative meaning. For example,

³ The list of NUTS regions can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/ramon/nuts/home_regions_en.html

the NUTS II “region”, Essex, includes the areas covered by Essex County Council, and the areas covered by the unitary authorities of Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea, areas part of the historical county of Essex. But they also include, in the case of the NUTS II area of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, for example, or the area Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, and North Somerset, areas which have little historical meaning. Nevertheless, these are deemed to be of equal standing as areas such as Catalonia or the Basque region in Spain: two historical and administratively coherent regions that are noted for their conflicts with the Madrid-based central Spanish government (see, for example, Keating 1998: 67).

The three NUTS levels are *regional* levels as distinct from the local level, however: there are two local levels as units of analysis, Local Administrative Units (LAU) 1 and 2. So on this reading, one may take the “regional” to exist somewhere between the local and the national, although where exactly is problematic.

Within the context of English regions, the concept of the “mega-region” has been introduced into the debate. Borrowed from the literature on the large urban areas in South Asia, in the English context, this would be a regional level above NUTS I. John, Tickell and Musson (2005) argue that the South East and London could be viewed as such a “mega-region”. Their argument is one that draws out other points in the English regional debate, and it is therefore worth our while to reflect upon them.

The background to their argument is work that they had previously published on the South East region (John, Musson & Tickell (2002)); here, they point to the anomalies of the oddly shaped region, which essentially is made up of what was left after London and the South West had been taken out of the equation. In particular, they had noted that there was a ‘political separation of city and city region’ with respect to the relationship between London and the South East. This would, they argued, hinder the development of integrated strategies, for example, for transport (John, Musson & Tickell 2002: 735). From this point of view, John, Tickell and Musson (2005) can be seen as an attempt to discover the implications of including London in their work on that corner of the country. Indeed, they make the point that much of the prosperity of the region depends upon ‘its geographic proximity to the London economy’ and that the ‘London and South East economies are interdependent entities’, with the ‘commuter belt’ going as far as

Southampton (John, Musson & Tickell 2002: 738); yet not only is the South East institutionally weak as a region, the London mayor, focussing on inner-London issues such as the London Underground, is unable to take a much broader strategic overview on issues such as transport (John, Musson & Tickell 2002: 738).

As if countering the criticisms made by Musson, Tickell and John (2005), the mega-region was recognised during 2005, and the East of England, South East and London Development Agencies collaborate as part of the *Greater South East*. Dubbed a 'super region' (SEEDA 2005: 2), this appears to give recognition to the role of the interdependent nature of the economic relationship that exists, not just between the South East and London, but also the East of England and London. London is (apparently) the UK's 'only "world city"', and one of the motives behind this collaboration is that and the purpose of the collaboration is to head off competition from other such areas, such as New York, Silicon Valley and the Shanghai regions (SEEDA 2005: 2).

A second mega-, or super, region has also appeared in the last few years. This is a collaboration between the three "northern" region Regional Development Agencies: Yorkshire and Humberside, the North East and the North West, under the label 'the Northern Way'. The task is to close the £29 billion gap in output between the 'North' and the UK average (NWSG 2004: 1).

It would seem therefore that there are different ways we can draw something called a "region" on a map of England, before we can even consider a description of what a region is. Indeed, one of the characteristics of the debate about English regions is the 'question of how to draw regional boundaries' (Stanyer 1997: 86). Of course, the drawing of these boundaries is itself more than just an exercise in topography. As Keating points out, the 'drawing of the boundaries can alter not only the social content of regionalism, but the political power balance in regional institutions' (Keating 1998: 80).

The term "region" is 'so varied that the term almost escapes descriptive function' (Keating 1998: 79). A region might refer, as Marks et al. (2008: 113) point out, to an economic, cultural region, or social entity. Nevertheless, the region has become increasingly important since the 1980s. In particular, Keating suggests that the region

has emerged in two senses. Firstly, as a political arena in which issues are framed, resources allocated and decisions made. Secondly, they are also actors competing for investment, markets and other opportunities (Keating 1998: 78, 109).

For Keating, the region, a 'social construction' (Keating 1998: 109), has been invented in Western Europe as the result of three processes of restructuring coming together which has led to the reconfiguring of territorial politics. Firstly, there has been a 'functional restructuring', due to changes in international economics, for example, where firms are no longer dependent on territory and may easily move, but the surrounding community cannot. This has led to an emphasis on the particular characteristics a region has relating to its environment, workforce, and so on, in order to attract investment within the context of a global economy. One of the consequences of this is the trend towards regional development policies, and the region has become increasingly important in planning as a result – another functional aspect.

Secondly, institutional restructuring has also occurred, which has taken the form of decentralisation, perhaps for reasons of administrative rationalisation and modernisation, or, Keating argues, because of pressure from the European Union which, through its regional policies, has encouraged regional mobilisation.

Finally, there has been regional mobilisation within the regions themselves. This can take different forms – such regional mobilisation might not be seeking greater autonomy. Rich, dominant regions, for example, are liable to be centralist, as are poor regions. Those rich regions that are not dominant within a state (for example, Lombardy) tend to favour decentralisation. Catalonia serves as an example of an "historic" region that seeks greater independence, either within the state or Europe (Keating 1997: 387-390).

These factors will not affect all states the same way, but generally, Keating argues, they have created the situation whereby regions have been constructed (Keating 1997: 388). This "re-territorialisation" of politics is taking place against a background of de-territorialisation with the growth of 'global systems' or the 'interaction of individuals as consumers' (Keating 1998: 109).

The region is seen by Keating as a territorial space that is given meaning by functional, political and social factors (Keating 1998: 79). Keating has identified five dimensions in which the region may exist: a territorial space, a political space, a space for civil society to organise, an institutional system (be it merely administrative or a fully-fledged regional government) and as an autonomous actor in a wider political space (Keating 1997: 390-96). Elsewhere, Keating has listed the social and political factors as including culture, identity, politics as well as the institutions and traditions of civil society, aside from the functional factors (Keating 1998: 83).

More recently, Keating has put forward a simplified version with three dimensions: 'economics, culture/identity, and politics/institutions' (Keating 2006: 148). Essentially, however, this is simply as it appears: a reformulation of the same idea. For example, the region's role as an actor is one that Keating recognises as a feature of a region. This is either a dimension in its own right, perhaps within the context of EU decision-making, or within the global economy, and to be viewed as a discrete dimension to European regions that varies within national contexts. Or, as in the later formulation, the role of the region as an actor may be examined using the three dimensions of economics, culture and politics. A region may be an actor with an interest in language issues, for example, and 'have been active in trying to secure cultural exceptions' to EU market rules (Keating 2006: 151).

To illustrate some of these aspects, the region as a territorial space is, broadly, a given territory somewhere between the national and the local, for example, as was described above in the discussion on the EU's NUTS system, a system which best exemplifies regions as merely territorial spaces.

On the other hand, the region as a functional space is the outcome of the functional restructuring mentioned above, in terms of the increasing global economic restructuring as well as planning. With respect to planning, increasingly the regional level is seen as the appropriate level at which to plan for universities, roads, airports, ports, industrial sites, research centres and railways. The regional aspect has even been introduced into sectors such as health and education, although responsibility for the policy lies elsewhere (Keating 1998: 81).

Likewise, institutional restructuring has given the region institutional dimensions. Regions have been the point at which national policies have been integrated, and where local government can meet the national government. Institutions emerge to perform this role which, of course, may be fulfilling a functional role, just as planning is about the territorial as well as the functional (Keating 1998: 81).

A region as a political space is a region as an arena for political debate. Scotland, even before devolution, is one such example, as it has its own internal debate and political agenda. This is not shared with Italian and French regions, which, even though they have elected governments, are linked to the national system or local federations (Keating 1997: 390). Some regions such as Northern Ireland may have their own regional parties where none of the main national parties are present, or be semi-regionalised, as is the case with Wales and Plaid Cymru and Scotland with the Scottish Nationalist Party (Keating 1997: 391).

Using just five factors of culture, identity, Government institutions, civil society, and economic regionalism, Keating (1998: 110) identifies three types of region. First, there are the historic nationalities, which, apart from Wales and Scotland, also include Catalonia, Galicia, the Basque Country, Brittany and Corsica. These share a strong sense of culture and identity, as well as civil institutions, and they may vary with the amount of self-government they have. Regions with a distinct linguistic identity, such as the Languedoc in France, or Sicily in Italy, may also be included within this group. This group of regions contrasts with the regions that are primarily defined by their institutions. These institutions have been used to create a political space and a space for effective action. They include the Western German Länder, as well as some French regions. Finally, there are administrative regions, and here, along with some more French regions and Scandinavian regions, are the English regions. Crucially, these lack a 'sense of common identity' and 'do not correspond to regions in other senses' (Keating 1998: 110).

While Keating helps us to understand broadly what can be meant by a region, it is interesting to note that the case of Cornwall does not appear anywhere in his analysis. Cornwall would appear to constitute a region based on an historic "nation" (the first type he identifies above) with its own language from which most of its place names derive,

adding to a sense of difference and underlining a strong sense of territory. It also has a civic institution in the form of a county council. (These points have been made many times, but see, for example, Sandford 2006a: 85-86). It appears that what Keating has done is to offer a typology of regions based on “official” regions that are recognised by their respective national governments as a “region” as opposed to a level of what is officially seen as local authority level. As if to underscore the point, the English regions considered by Keating (1998: 201) are those of the then Standard Statistical Regions, and not the present English regions.

1.1.2 Regionalisation and Regionalism

The words “regionalisation” and “regionalism” are often used by authors without clarifying what is to be meant by these terms. To give some examples: Mawson (1998); John, Musson and Tickell (2002) and Tomaney (2002) all refer to “regionalism” and even use the word in the titles of their respective pieces, without defining what “regionalism” actually is.

Wagstaff (1999) clarifies the concepts of “regionalisation” and “regionalism”:

“The word ‘regionalism’ can denote the aspirations and activism of the concerned inhabitants of a region. [It] can often be confused with regionalisation, which is perhaps better thought of as the pursuit of state-centred policies designed to impose ‘top-down’ remedies especially economic ones to regional problems and imbalances” (Wagstaff 1999: 6).

This concurs with a distinction made in Keating and Loughlin (1997), where *regionalisation* is seen as state policy, but *regionalism* can be seen as ‘political demands’ from the ‘bottom up’ (Keating & Loughlin 1997: 18). The confusion of the terms appears to lie in the fact that regionalisation can be referred to as *top-down regionalism*, as opposed to *bottom-up regionalism* (Loughlin & Keating 1997: 39).

Throughout this thesis, I shall follow the more specific terms ‘regionalism’ and ‘regionalisation’ as defined above by Wagstaff.

I also refer to 'New Labour' at various times throughout this thesis, as well as the Labour Party. In this, I follow (for example) Flinders (2004: 127) in referring to the Labour Party from the assumption of Tony Blair to the leadership in 1994 and the beginning of the 'New' Labour project as 'New Labour'. When I refer to 'Labour' or the 'Labour Party', then, it is to the pre-1994 Labour Party to which I refer.

1.2 Explaining the Emergence of the English Regions

An initial overview of the literature revealed to me three key areas that each in its own way appeared to offer something to an explanation of why the English regions came into prominence when they did.

In the following sections, I wish to highlight these areas – and their respective literatures – which will be more fully explored and developed in the following chapters. In doing this, I want to show where my own research comes in, and the 'gap' that I have filled.

1.2.1 Europeanisation

For the 1999 elections to the European Parliament, the constituencies were re-drawn along regional lines (Butt Philip 1990: 25), which, along with the opening of regional information offices in Brussels representing the same English regions around this time, seemed to give credence to the slogan 'Europe of the Regions'.

The phrase "Europe of the Regions" sums up the view according to which European regions are seen as becoming increasingly important within the EU, increasingly alongside, and not subordinate to, supranational and national institutions. It is further claimed that the increasing mobilisation of regions is a direct effect of EU membership. Tömmel (1998: 53) remarks that: 'it is obvious that regions are steadily moving towards a more active role' within European decision-making, and that the changes are brought about by 'in particular the European Commission and its evolving modes of decision-making'.

Marks (1993, 1996) has identified in particular the role of the EU's structural funds as having a particular role to play in the formation of a multi-level polity. The debate centres largely on the extent to which the national executive of a given Member State acts as a "gatekeeper" and therefore remains in control of the policy process. Marks (1996: 417-18), in making a case for a multi-level governance approach, argues that the European Commission and sub-national actors are now more prominent in the decision-making process, with national executives finding that they are obliged to share responsibility.

Although Marks (1996: 404-05) does concede a "gatekeeping" role for the State at some stages of the decision-making process in his examination of EU regional policy, it is Anderson (1990) and Bache (1998, 1999) who have argued the case more strongly. Bache (1999) in particular argues that Marks has overstated the effect of the introduction of the partnership principle in the 1988 reforms of the structural funds. Whereas Marks has seen this as representing a challenge to the dominance of national government (Marks 1993: 402), Bache (1999: 37) argues that an analysis of policy outcomes shows that, in fact, in the case of the UK, the national government has tended to retain its dominant position within the new partnership arrangements; it has thus played the role of the '*extended gatekeeper*' (Bache 1999: 38; emphasis in original).

Yet despite the apparent dominance of the UK government with regard to EU regional policy within the UK, the impact of structural funds has been put forward as a key factor for the emergence English regions; a result, in other words, of *Europeanisation*. Looking specifically, at the English regions, Burch and Gomez (2004) deploy a definition of Europeanisation as follows:

'[t]he study of the ways in which and the extent to which EU political, social and economic dynamics interact with [and shape] the patterns of discourse and identities and the nature of polities, institutions and public policies at supra-national (EU), national and sub-national levels' (Burch & Gomez 2004: 1),

before going on to look at specifically how Europeanisation thus defined has impacted on 'various institutional dimensions and components of the polity' (Burch & Gomez 2004: 1). They further identify five components of a polity: electoral; civil society

representatives (which include political parties, Non-Governmental Organisations, elite networks, and so on); the political executive and the civil service; however, they concentrate mostly on institutions (Burch & Gomez 2004: 3).

The focus of their study – and it is one of the very few to examine English *regions* in this context – is on what might be called the “Europeanising effect” of structural funds. They argue that it is these funds which, by underpinning the 1988 structural funding reforms and the introduction of the partnership principle, made possible a regional focus that did not exist before. This “Europeanising” effect was, for Burch and Gomez, most keenly felt in the years immediately prior to the New Labour victory of 1997, but even after then, continued to play a significant role (Burch & Gomez 2004: 8-9, 20).

1.2.2 New Regionalism, New Labour

If one were to arrive at the conclusion that membership of the EU was not a decisive factor in the emergence of the English regions, there may be other economic or political factors. One approach taken to examine the apparent growing significance of regions is “New Regionalism”. From this perspective, the emergence of the English regions coincides with a global phenomenon of regionalisation, and a renewed interest in regions by academics. In part, this is because the region is now seen as the level most suited for the ‘interaction of political, social and economic processes in an era of “globalization”’ (Tomaney & Ward 2000: 471).

This is taking place when the State is (the argument goes) being challenged from above by “globalisation”, and laterally by the resurgence of the private sector and the growth of the “knowledge economy”. With the State less willing to intervene in the economy and encourage a more balanced regional development, regions have increasingly found themselves to be actors in their own right, and in competition with other regions around the world, without the ‘framework of the nation-state’ (Keating 1998: 73; Tomaney & Ward 2000: 472).

New Regionalism in particular claims that the region ‘is an effective arena for situating the institutions of post-Fordist economic governance’ (MacLeod 2001: 807). New

Regionalism has as its focal point innovation, learning and knowledge creation, all of which are deemed crucial for economic competitiveness (Jones 2001: 1186). A feature of this emphasis on innovation and competitiveness is the role of clusters and agglomeration, and the role that the region has in facilitating their development to gain a competitive advantage. The equation is that strong regional economies equal a strong national economy. The work of Michael Porter is often cited in this respect (for example, Dunning 2000: 22; Bristow 2005: 285-288; Jones & MacLeod 2004: 439).

This, incidentally, involves a different way of viewing what a region is – as two proponents of New Regionalism put it, the region is no longer something which is, for example, disadvantaged (in the 1970s, say) but is now a ‘nexus of processes rather than a thing’ (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 65).

Within this context, Amin and Thrift (1994) have assessed the role of “institutional thickness”. Institutions are defined in the broad sense – formal organisations, as well as informal conventions, habits and routines in a given particular area (Amin & Thrift 1994: 16). The concept of institutional thickness is an attempt to capture the ‘social and cultural factors’ that are seen as part of economic success for regions (Amin & Thrift 1994: 14). However, while institutional thickness may be a factor in economic success, the relationship between institutional thickness and economic success is problematic: institutional thickness may neither guarantee economic success, nor might it be necessary for economic success – the case of the “M4 corridor” here is cited by the authors as an example of an economically successful area but without the institutional thickness described (Amin & Thrift 1994: 17).

Jones (2001) has underlined the importance of considering *territorial scale*. There are two important points that Jones makes: firstly, that the considerations of scale do not assume the region to be a ‘given’, but as something that is contested and the outcome of struggle, in contrast to New Regionalism, which assumes the pre-existence of regions (Jones 2001: 1201, 1203).

Secondly, the use of regional scale by policy makers is a way of legitimising particular policies or interventions. The institutional form of the state, on this reading, reflects the power of the national state.

Brenner (1999) further argues that the state is itself the object of re-territorialisation; globalisation has ‘reconfigured the *scalar* organisation of capital’s endemic dynamic of de- and reterritorialisation’ (Brenner 1999: 436 [emphasis in original]). The distinction that Brenner makes is between the state’s role in *re-territorialisation* and the state’s role at the *national scale* in ‘circumscribing capital flows, economic transactions, urban hierarchies and social relations’ (Brenner 1999: 438). The state may be able to maintain territoriality, but this is not to say that its policies will be tied to the national scale. Likewise, re-scaling does not, for Brenner, imply that the state is losing territoriality as globalists are liable to argue: ‘neo-liberal globalisation is re-scaling state territoriality rather than eroding it’ (Brenner 1999: 440).

This assumes an organisation along territorial and scalar lines, a view of spatial change that means ‘reterritorialisation follows deterritorialisation, and spatial scales are relativised under globalisation’ (Amin 2002: 238). For Amin, this leads to viewing cities, for example, as no longer merely national cities, but also as global cities; a “nesting of territories” made up of “in-here” relations into multiple scales of “out-there”, which in turn can lead to a politics of space in which the global, ‘out-there’, is seen as “bad”, but the local, ‘in-here’, is seen as “good” (Amin 2002: 388). Amin argues that the rise of electronic communications, global networks and travel, has led to a ‘perforation of scalar and territorial forms of social organisation’, thus subverting any ‘ontology of territorial containment and scalar nesting’ (Amin 2002: 395).

Nevertheless, a key tenet of New Regionalist thinking is that this is a “bottom-up” process in the light of perceived failures of policy at the national level. This is, in other words, regionalism and *not* regionalisation as I have defined them in the discussion above.

Tomaney and Ward (2000: 477), however, caution against viewing the emergence of English regions in terms of a ‘global logic or new development model’.

1.2.3 Government, Governance and the “Hollow State”

Thus cautioned, we come to the wider question of changes in governance, beyond that of economics. Jessop (2002: 226) has argued that both market failure and State failure have led to the breakdown of “hierarchical” governance – the traditional top-down governance associated with governments in the past. This has led to the emergence of “heterarchical” governance, which may be defined as ‘horizontal self-organization among mutually independent actors’ (Jessop 2002: 52) or ‘reflexive self-organisation’ (Jessop 2003: 5) in response to these failures. This recalls Rhodes’ definition of governance as: ‘self-organising, inter-organisational networks’ (Rhodes 1997: 53).

Metagovernance, meanwhile, describes the view that “self-organisation” is itself “organised” through the design of institutions that facilitate networking and self-organisation (Jessop 1998: 42). Kooiman (2003: 183) also attributes an “oversight” (or ‘helicopter’) role to metagovernance with respect to governance.

The question of the ‘hollowing out’ of the State is raised by the growth of governance. Rhodes (1997: 100-08) has famously argued that the State is threatened from above by globalisation while at the same time its capacity to intervene is limited by the move towards privatisation and the use of government agencies, as well as the growth in the self-organising networks of governance. Holliday (2000: 157) has argued, on the other hand, that such evidence is hard to find.

The debate on re-territorialisation and re-scaling was alluded to above. When this is brought to bear here, the suggestion may be that a multi-level governance approach to the changing British State would be an alternative to the “hollowing out” thesis (Ayres & Pearce 2004: 256). The argument is that ‘[t]hrough the creation of new structures, processes, institutions, and even cultures, state actors are seeking to ‘fill in’ the ‘hollowing out’ of strategic state capacity’ (Bache & Flinders 2004: 93). There is an ‘enhanced role of national states in managing inter-scalar relations’ (Jessop 2004: 64).

The “asymmetrical power model” of Marsh, *et al.*, (2003) posits a British State that has retained its authority. On this view, the British State may be part of a policy network, but by virtue of access to resources that are denied to other actors, the relationships with other actors are asymmetrical. As Kooiman argues, the nature of governance may have changed, but the nature of the State has not (Kooiman 2003: 116, 130).

1.3 Research Questions and Outline of Methodology

The brief overview above has brought to the fore a number of areas and ideas that are to be followed up in greater detail.

As the review shows, there would appear to be different ideas on why a particular country may have regional governance, if not regional government. The overarching question is: how can the move towards the regionalisation of England be explained?

This question may be broken down into three other “sub-questions.” These secondary questions reflect three key ideas that have been advanced as possible explanations for a move towards regionalisation, and consequently make certain predictions about what happens as a consequence.

The initial inspiration of this research project was the examination of what I present here as a first possible attempt to explain regionalisation in England, that of Europeanisation. Hence the first follow-up question is, does Europeanisation explain English regionalisation? By asking this question, I want to examine the relationship between Europeanisation on the one hand and regionalisation in England on the other.

A second follow-up question is, does New Regionalism account for the emergence of English regions? Here, the relationship between New Regionalist thinking and the English regions is to be examined.

A final follow-up question asks, do the changes in governance account for regionalisation in England? In part, this question turns on the extent to which regionalisation has transformed State power in Britain, insofar as England is concerned, and the extent to which there has been devolution of power to regional authorities.

Original research was brought to bear on these questions in order to test the ideas that have been put forward as possible answers to the question of regionalisation. After deciding on a particular approach, two case study regions were chosen to give focus the research.

To begin with, the approach adopted was what might be described as a “bottom-up” approach. Bearing in mind the *initial* question which prompted the research, which had to do with the role of the EU, this approach involved looking from a regional perspective “upwards” to the supranational level, in order to find what precisely the impact was on the regions in question.

The merits of this approach have been pointed out. Jeffrey (1997), pointed to a number of benefits of just such a “bottom-up” approach that would be a ‘promising route for further research’ on the role of sub-national authority (SNA) engagement in EU policy-making. For example, by ‘pointing to the circumstances in which SNAs are likely to seek [...] to gain intra-state access to EU decision-making and by elaborating upon the ‘variations’ which exist in MLG [multi-level governance]’ (Jeffrey 1997: 218). With respect to specifically Europeanisation, it has been observed that: ‘[t]he focus on Europeanization can produce serious fallacies when it leads the researcher to adopt a top-down logic’ (Radaelli 2003: 51). This, it is argued, will allow the researcher to see the choices made, and to the rules, procedures and structures that will effect policy, and will then be better placed to see the effect of Europeanisation on policy-making (Radaelli 2003: 51).

An option could have been to focus on one region alone, a single case study. However, single case study research is usually strongest in unusual or rare cases, and where it confines itself to explaining that single case. It is – almost by definition – harder to make more general observations from that single case (Yin 2003: 46, 52).

A multiple-case study, on the other hand, allows for comparisons and similarities to be revealed. The multiple-case study might be seen as similar to conducting multiple experiments. Hence either the results will be predicted to be the same (dubbed “literal replication”), or the results will be different for predictable reasons (dubbed “theoretical replication”) (Yin 2003: 46-47). The multiple-case study is not only potentially strong analytically, but also allows for the possibility of direct replication, even allowing for slightly varying contexts of the individual cases chosen (Yin 2003: 52).

For these reasons, two case study regions were selected. All of the nine English regions have their individual characteristics, some of them more marked than others. There are good reasons, however, for choosing the South West and the East of England.

To begin with, I was building on previous work on English regions. However, outside of general overviews, such as Hazell (2003), Tomaney and Mawson and Sandford (2005), research has tended to focus on what might be described as the 'Northern' regions. These are: Yorkshire and Humberside (well represented: examples include Armstrong, *et al.* (2001); Chapman (2004); and Bache (2000)), the North East (for example Humphrey and Shaw (2004) and Sandford 200) and the North West (Burch and Holliday (1993) is an example here).

The Midland regions are also represented – by Jacobs (1997) and Ball (1999) (West Midlands) and Foley (1998) (East Midlands), while the South East (the 'problem region') is served by John, Musson and Tickell (2002). London, with its directly elected assembly and mayor, is often treated separately from the other English regions; likewise, it does not form part of this enquiry.

This leaves the East of England and the South West as relatively neglected by researchers to warrant further investigation with the possibility of filling an apparent "gap".

No two regions are exactly the same, of course, but the South West and the East of England has some similarities, over and above being in 'southern' England. In this sense, the study was constructed as a "most similar" model. This means that with the differences between the two cases being all the more likely to be accounted for by the variables under study (see, for example, May (1993)).

To begin with, both regions are "polycentric". Neither have an urban centre, such as Birmingham or a Manchester, to serve as an obvious regional capital and point of focus for the region, and both regions have to a certain extent similar problems with conflicting "sub-regional" identities. The case of Cornwall has been elaborated upon earlier in the Introduction, and will be referred to again. Although Cornwall is unique, in the East of England there is a noted East Anglian identity, one that for the most part centres upon Norfolk and Suffolk. Ward and Tomaney (2002: 111-113) show that there is a split in the

region between southern Essex, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire that look to London, and Norfolk and Suffolk, which have an East Anglian identity, one that is sometimes seen as a “metropolitan” versus “rural” split. It is enough to question the coherence of the East of England region in the way that the South West has also been questioned.

Both the regions have similar population sizes, while their employment and unemployment rates, for example, are likewise similar, both employment being higher than the UK average and unemployment being lower than the UK average⁴. In most of the statistics that the Office of National Statistics deem to be “key”, the East and South West lie in third and fourth place behind London and the South East. Critically, however, given that I wanted to test for a “Europeanisation effect”, the South West was in receipt of Objective One funding, which represented a stark contrast with the East of England (see Chapter Two).

The relevant policy documents, from both national level and the two regions, were consulted and compared. Simply put, this meant one could see what national government planned for the regions, the extent to which regional activity was proscribed, and the differences between the two regions when they developed their policy documents. There exists in the literature little comparative analysis on specific regional documents in particular. The two key documents that regions are required to produce are the Regional Economic Strategies and Regional Spatial Strategies, so attention focussed on these.

A total of eleven interviews were conducted. Nearly all of the interviewees were interviewed by telephone, and all were aware that they were participating in a taped interview. Interviewees were assured also of confidentiality, which has been honoured in the writing of this thesis.

A semi-structured interview is a popular choice among social scientists. This is often seen as being “between” two other types of interview technique: the structured interview, in which interviewees give simple answers to a questionnaire. This is the approach often

⁴ The Office of National Statistics ‘Regional Snapshot’ can be found at:
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/regionalsnapshot/>

taken by trained interviewees for survey data, and allows close comparison between the responses solicited.

At the other end of the spectrum is the unstructured (or focused, or “unstandardised”, or informal) interview. This is popular by those collecting oral history, for example. It allows the interviewee to talk, undirected by the interviewer, on issues that concern them at the time, as they think of them.

Both of these techniques, then, contrast with the “middle” option, as it were. Here, the interviewee has some specific questions, but also the flexibility to respond to the answers provided, and to explore issues that rise during the course of the interview. Also, this non-specialised interviewing technique allows social researchers themselves to conduct the interview, with the convenience that entails (May 1993: 92-94).

From the literature, it was very clear that that there were two significant documents that the regions were collectively charged with producing. As mentioned above, these were the Regional Economic Strategy and the Regional Spatial Strategy. The RDAs were given the responsibility for drawing up the Economic Strategy, whereas the Spatial Strategy was prepared by the Assembly.

With regard to the Spatial Strategy, the interviewees targeted were for the most part instrumental in the preparation of these documents (for example, the respective Chairs of the planning Committees, as well as other Committee and Assembly member forums). Where they existed, I interviewed the counterparts of one region in the other region. At the end of the interview, interviewees were also asked to recommend other people to interview, by which means I was also able to check that I had not overlooked someone with whom I should speak.

In order to examine the development of regionalisation and the impact of the Assemblies, I made a point of contacting what appeared to be new actors, the multi-faith forums and transport forums (again, where these existed). This helped to further an understanding of how the regionalisation process was apparently creating new actors, or how older actors were adapting to the new regional agenda.

In seeking interviewees from the RDAs, a particular difficulty arose with respect to the East of England Development Agency. After a number of attempts to contact someone with whom I could speak with regarding the Economic Strategy and innovation, I had to admit defeat. It appeared that no one had time to spare. I therefore felt that two corresponding interviews with South West Regional Development Agency staff could not be used, along with another two RDA-related interviews, as a reasonable comparison could not be made. Nevertheless, I do not believe this has altered my findings in any way, and did not in anyway prevent my examination of the key documents, the Regional Economic Strategies. Indeed, at one point I was simply instructed to read the Strategy by a member of the East of England Development Agency as this would answer my questions. So this I have done.

Appendix A lists the questions that I made a point of asking each interviewee.

The following chapters are arranged in order that the questions set out above are tackled. Chapter Two sets out the historical background to the regional idea in England and examines the history of regionalism and regionalisation. It looks at the reasons why regions in England have been used in the past and previous discussions surrounding them. It also examines the role of English regions in Labour policies from the 1970s.

I turn to what was my original research question in Chapter Three: to what extent is Europeanisation a factor in English regionalisation? Europeanisation has been cited as a significant contributory factor to the emergence of regions within Europe, as indeed the phrase “Europe of the Regions” indicates. This chapter examines the role Europeanisation has had in English regionalisation.

In Chapter Four, I turn my attention to what I see as one of key policy areas that lies behind the creation of English regions, that of economic governance. New Regionalism and the rescaling of economic governance by the state have both been seen as responses to globalisation, and have been cited as an explanatory factor in the increasing importance of regions. The Regional Development Agencies, which form the focus of the fourth chapter, are at the centre of New Labour’s regional policy. This chapter will look at the development agencies, as well as policies on universities and innovation, in the context of the debates surrounding New Regionalism and economic rescaling.

Chapter Five then goes on to examine Regional Assemblies and Government Offices. These are examined within the context of the debate about the emergence of “governance” and the “hollowing” out of the state. The role of the Regional Assemblies in particular is examined in terms of the impact that it has on the emerging regional governance structures. Planning is a key function of the Assemblies, and in that regard, the Regional Spatial Strategies are examined. In particular, we want to discover how far Regional Assemblies are free from state control, and how far they represent an innovation in governance.

Chapter Five was written before the announcement of the abolition of the regional assemblies. This development, and the possible future trajectory of the English regions, is considered along with general conclusions which follow in the Chapter Six.

2. English Regionalisation in Context

The development of a regional tier of governance under New Labour has a historical context. Exploring this allows us to come to some view on the extent to which the architecture has changed and how fundamental these changes have been. It also allows for an assessment to be made about the factors that prompted the changes to the regional level governance architecture within the last ten years – is it primarily a response to membership of the EU, or a response to globalisation, or to something else?

This chapter, then, seeks to put the New Labour agenda into context. I will show that regional organisation of central governmental functions is not an alien concept to the UK. The point, however, is that it has traditionally been, not merely “top-down” basis, but also “vertically”, with different departments and agencies using different regions. Governmental functions have not traditionally been regionalised “horizontally”, that is, to standard, accepted, regions with coterminous boundaries. While Government departments have recognised a role for a regional tier of governance, they have failed to agree among themselves where these regions are.

I make three central arguments. The first is that New Labour’s agenda insofar as the regions are concerned is a legacy of ‘old’ Labour. That is, one that existed prior to the election in 1994 of Tony Blair as leader of the Labour Party. In particular, it was Labour’s commitment not to English regionalisation but Scottish devolution that was one of the key factors in the creation of a regional tier in England. Secondly, and not entirely unrelated, I will argue that this agenda overall is not one that can be divorced entirely from an older debate about regions in England, a debate that recognised a need for regions, but failed to identify where precisely they are.

Thirdly, these ideas have been joined with two regional agendas that New Labour has added. The first of these might be described as the “ODPM agenda”, which inherited

previous thinking on the regions, and pushed for fully elected regional assemblies. The second agenda, which I have dubbed the “Treasury agenda”, represents an economic agenda that the Treasury came to dominate at the turn of the twenty-first century. Insofar as this one is interested in utilising regional policy to benefit the national economy over all, it may be represented as a “regional turn” by the Treasury – but one that is concerned with the *national* economic benefits that a successful regional policy will provide.

I will also highlight the difficulties experienced in defining specifically an English ‘region’. This, I will suggest, demonstrates an essentially technocratic, functional, approach to regionalisation within the English context. It is one that almost by definition is a top-down process, rather than a bottom-up process from the regional level, and not one concerned with, for example, greater democracy.

2.1 English Regions: A Political Response

Ideas on English regions have a longer history than is sometimes realised. Some form of regional governance has been proposed more than once in the past. Between the nineteenth century and the 1930s, however, it was usually in response to a wider constitutional challenge from Irish and, to a certain extent, Scottish nationalism.

2.1.1 Home Rule

Gladstone, in his noted 1879 Midlothian campaign that would ultimately propel him to a second term as Prime Minister, remarked in his Second Midlothian speech at Dalkeith that:

‘...if we can make arrangements under which Ireland, Scotland, Wales, portions of England, can deal with questions of local and special interest to themselves more efficiently than Parliament now can, that, I will say, will be the attainment of a great national good.’ (Gladstone, 1970: 87)

Gladstone reminded his Scottish listeners that, of course, the “Imperial Parliament” would still be supreme.

The interesting thing to note is perhaps not just that this was a liberal solution, one that ruled out an English parliament, and not therefore a *nationalist* solution, as Bogdanor (1999: 8) points out, but rather that the proposal was a response to the Irish demands for Home Rule (see, for example, Mawson 1998: 158-159).

But perhaps it might be argued that it *was* a nationalist solution, after all: it responded to the emerging Irish nationalism; it recognised potential Scottish and Welsh claims for Home Rule; but when it came to England, there would not be an obvious and serious demand for English Home Rule, but something on a smaller scale. The reason is arguably simple enough: English identity has been subsumed within – or confused with – a wider British identity (for example, see Kumar 2003: xi, 1-3); the British (the then Imperial) Parliament *was* the English Parliament. On this reading, the same ‘oversight’ (for want of a better word) lay at the heart of John Major’s own apparent confusion in the early 1990s between “English” and “British”: in 1992, he referred to the British people having a ‘thousand years of history’ (presumably, he meant English people, as Britain is only just 300 years old) and, again in 1993, he referred famously to a Britain of warm beer and cricket – things, again, usually associated with England (Kumar 2003: 227).

Some have warned of the “English question” not being resolved, for example Tomaney (2002: 2), and Bogdanor (1999: 190). Since Tomaney (2002: 2) commented on the ‘benign indifference’ that characterised the English response to Welsh and Scottish devolution, there has been a noted resurgence in English nationalism (see, for example, *The Observer*, 26 November 2006), to the point today where one recent poll put demand for an English parliament at sixty-one per cent. The Conservative Party, meanwhile, is openly entertaining the possibility of an English Parliament (*The Guardian*, 15, 16 January 2007; see also Tomaney, 2002: 2).

In terms of English regions, Gladstone, in response to Irish nationalism, appears to be introducing the idea that ‘portions of England’ (if not regions) should have some form of

devolution to compensate for any moves to greater Irish, Scottish and Welsh national devolution.

The creation of County Councils in 1888 did not entirely settle the question of precisely what “portions” in England would experience “Home Rule”. Scottish and Welsh devolution was again mooted following the end of the First World War (Mawson 1998: 158). It was this debate that prompted a paper in 1917, and in 1919 a book, *Provinces of England: A Study of Some Geographical Aspects of Devolution*, by CB Fawcett. Fawcett put forward the idea of dividing England up into twelve smaller units (“provinces”), which would be roughly equal to Ireland, Scotland and Wales in terms of resources and population, and all of which would in turn be part of a British ‘federation’ (Fawcett 1917: 127; 1919: 23, 76). Again, this was as a direct result of not just Irish nationalism, but also growing Scottish and Welsh demands (see also Sandford 2005: 33).

C B Fawcett is usually credited with one of the first studies of how a map of regional England would look like. That he came up with, not one, but *two* maps (see figs 1 and 2), in each of his examinations should perhaps alert us to a particular problem of regional boundaries.

Fawcett saw a ‘federation’ within which the English, self-governing, provinces were to exist (Fawcett 1917: 126-127). His argument was that subdividing England as part of a wider British federation was necessary so as not to allow an English Parliament to dominate the proposed federation (Fawcett 1917: 125). Beyond arguing for the necessity of this, however, Fawcett was not actually interested in the machinery of government but rather the geographical considerations of boundaries.

2.1.2 Planning, boundaries and administrative decentralisation

The debate over territorial politics died down following the end of the First World War, but the debate over boundaries would be re-opened in the 1930s and 1940s – this time within the context of planning regions.

The starting point appears to have been the Barlow Commission of 1937, which was set up to look at the 'remedial measures to cope with the pressing social, economic, and strategic problems created by the geographical distribution of industrial population' (Spence-Sales 1947: 508-09).

In examining the issue of boundaries, Gilbert (1939) picked up where Fawcett had left off, and reviewed the regions already in use in England. This study was very much a forerunner to the studies carried out in later years, by Hogwood and Lindley (1982), Hogwood (1995) and Hogwood (1996), in that it examined the administrative practice of the time: he set himself the task of examining 'some of the numerous schemes in which a regional plan has been adopted for various branches of organization in England and Wales' (Gilbert 1939: 30). Gilbert argued that a 'new type of administrative unit is required' between the levels of local authority and the State, in order 'to plan for town and countryside at one and the same time' (Gilbert 1939: 30). Gilbert contended that when Fawcett had been writing, theory was ahead of practice. However, a growing tendency for the State to regionalise which in Gilbert's view had been spurred on by the growth of broadcasting, in particular, was now ahead of 'theory' (Gilbert 1939: 29).

This underlines the political motivation behind Fawcett's proposals; the subject of regions had now to be revisited with planning in mind, as complexity grew with the introduction of new technologies. We see this in the choice of cases that Gilbert makes: the meteorological offices of the Air Ministry, telephone areas, the regions used by the Central Electricity Board after its creation in 1928, transport regions proposed in 1929, Automobile Association areas and so on.

The Second World War had two principal effects on this process of regionalisation, for two related reasons. The Civil Defence Regions (fig 3) – which were in place before war broke out – were primarily concerned with the survival of national government. The second was simply managing the economic demands of war – essentially the production of munitions, aircraft and the like, as well as the supply of materials and labour (Harris 1958: 57).



Fig 1: CB Fawcett's proposed provinces, 1917. Taken from Gilbert (1939: 33)



Fig 2: CB Fawcett's proposed provinces, 1919. Taken from Gilbert (1939: 34)

It is clear that the wartime experience, during which some of the duties (if not powers) of central government were devolved, encouraged the immediate post-war governments to continue in a similar vein: various interdepartmental committees, such as the Labour Preference Committee, the Shipyards Control Committee and Iron and Steel Labour Supply Committee were set up in regions that largely conformed to the Civil Defence Regions. These now formed the basis of planning regions, as well as other committees, which oversaw building and physical planning (Spence-Sales 1947: 512-13). This effectively resolved the arguments during the war as to whether planning regions should be coterminous with Civil Defence Regions, and ignored the 1942 advice that '[n]othing could be more fatal than to accept the Civil Defence Regions as the last word on the subject' (Royal Geographical Society 1942: 80).

It was noted that, by 1956, no fewer than fifteen government departments had been regionalised, ten more than in 1939, with seven major regional committees (Harris 1958: 57-58, 66). The 'majority' of these departments did use a 'standard region', as defined by the Treasury, in 1946, when it took on the responsibility of overseeing regions and devolution to them (Harris 1958: 63, 66).

This move to regionalisation, however, is best described as “administrative decentralisation” – the departments that had regionalised their operations by 1956 made a point of firmly retaining control over policy; there was no devolution of power beyond that which was necessary to justify a regional office in the first place (Harris 1958: 66). The use by departments and agencies of their own separate “regions” with separate regional boundaries, however, has attracted criticism in the past, not least in the 1973 Kilbrandon Report (see below). Even Gilbert in 1939 noted that it was ‘essential that a uniform system of regions be devised for the country’ as the regions used by the different departments, agencies and other national bodies, did not coincide with one another (Gilbert 1939: 42).

This would continue to be a problem. In their (1979) study of the West Midlands, Keating and Rhodes found that, despite the West Midlands being one of the ‘more cohesive regions,’ different departments and agencies used boundaries that were not coterminous and, in the case of the Manpower Services Commission, the use of different boundaries for different functions could be found within the same agency (Keating & Rhodes 1982: 58). In a study of the relationship between sixty government organisations that operated regionally and the then standard regions in England, it was found that just twenty-six of these organisations present in the Yorkshire and Humberside “standard region” recognised that particular Standard Region as a region. The other thirty-six, in other words, were operating within different regional boundaries that did not respect the so-called “Standard Region”. This was in fact the *highest* correlation between the number of government organisations and the “standard” region: within other regions, the correlation was lower (Hogwood & Lindley 1982: 33).

This has meant that different agencies and departments operate with different regional boundaries. This was a problem recognised in the 1982 Labour Party document which outlined the Labour Party’s proposals for the English regions – the *Alternative Regional Strategy*. It pointed out that there were not just ‘regional outposts’ of national agencies, but also agencies organised along regional lines – unfortunately, none of them agreed with each other, neither in terms of scale nor boundaries. One of the effects of this was that it ‘increased central government influence over [...] local authorities’ (Prescott 1982: 18).



FIG. 4—The Civil Defence Regions of England and Wales with their capitals.

Fig 3 The Civil Defence regions, 1943
(taken from Stamp (1943: 542))

Fig 4 The modern English regions
(taken from ODPM website, 2002).

Writing later, in 1996, Hogwood still found the same problem. To give just one example: the Highways Agency, part of the then Department of Transport, had its own regional structure, different to the one used by the rest of the department (Hogwood 1996: 287).

This tradition of organising administrative functions “vertically” *within* Government departments rather than “horizontally” *across* Government departments by territory, however, is not to say that regionalisation is itself weak in England. As John and Whitehead pointed out (1997: 9), the fact is that central government has regionalised their functions, even if Government departments and agencies are not using uniform boundaries.

2.2 The Planning Regions

Around the time of the Second World War, then, it became clear that a tier of governance between the state and the local authority was needed for the purposes of planning, and

this was only spurred on by the wartime experience – both in terms of the results of experiments the Government conducted in devolving powers, and also because of the scale of reconstruction in post-war Britain (Sandford 2005: 17). The history of English regions had, in that sense, taken a “planning turn”.

2.2.1 Planning Boards and Councils

The 1960s saw renewed interest in regions, in part inspired by French ideas about thinking of land use and economic planning by *territory*, rather than by *function* (Sandford 2005: 17; Mawson 1998: 160). This had, as Sandford (2005: 17-18) shows, become mainstream within government under the Conservatives, before Labour came to power. In 1964, following Labour’s return to power, a Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) was set up, and this formally brought together land planning and economic planning (Sandford 2005: 18). And as part of the National Plan, two new regional bodies were set up. These were to help implement the policy objectives set out in the National Plan. The Regional Economic Planning Boards (REPBs) comprised senior civil servants from the region, and covered areas such housing, land use planning, transport, employment, industry and investment in public utility services. These were not organisations in their own right but rather a title for meetings between the regional directors of (central) government departments. The Regional Economic Planning Councils (REPCs), on the other hand, were made up of people from local government, industry, commerce and the universities. These were set up in eight English regions that were defined for the purpose, as well as Scotland and Wales, although from the start there never was any intention to give them any formal powers (Sandford 2005: 19; Lindley 1982:172).

The precise relationship, however, between the Boards and Councils, was unclear, to say the least, with staff and resources shared between both bodies. The Boards originally were to be advised by the Councils in the drawing up of regional plans, the Councils then co-ordinating the various government departments concerned with regional development and planning. However, in 1966, the Councils were given sole responsibility for these plans. This meant that the Councils, as regional representatives, had to draw up the plans, and then decide on the action to take as representatives of central government – very often the same civil servants were involved. It was also not

clear if they were to represent central government or local interests, or even if they were supposed to represent a region as a whole (Sandford 2005: 20-21; Lindley 1982: 176; Keating & Rhodes 1982: 68-70).

The decline of the National Plan from 1966 onwards, however, meant that REPCs became increasingly redundant. Both REPCs and REPBs had become 'largely ineffective by the beginning of the seventies' (Sandford 2005: 21), but it was not until 1980 that the REPCs were finally axed by the Conservatives, and the Boards survived until well into the 1980s. The REPBs developed, under the Department of the Environment (DoE), as the "eyes and ears" of government departments in the regions, as well as a 'network of communication' (Keating & Rhodes 1982: 71). The DoE itself developed a role of mediator between local authorities and developing regional strategies after it was created in 1970 (Keating & Rhodes 1982: 71; Lindley 1982: 185).

The legacy of the REPB and REPC experiment was not only that of region-based data (which did not exist before), the experience of planned production and the movement in planning away from merely physical planning to cover 'regional economic and social development aspirations' (Sandford 2005: 21).

Between 1986 and 1987, the regional boundaries for the REPBs had been changed, and made to fit in with new boundaries for the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Department of Transport (DT) and the Department of Environment (DoE) (Hogwood 1995: 270). This simple administrative "tidying-up" is significant as the DTI, the DT and the DoE were three of the four "founding" departments of the Government Offices (see below), and, consequently, the Government Offices have inherited the same boundaries, with the exception of London and, for a while, Merseyside, which had their own special arrangements (Hogwood 1996: 19).

The effect of this is clearly seen in the East of England region. The DoE, in the seventies, had a regional office that covered the six counties of the East of England, plus Buckinghamshire. This did not fit with the planning regions, or the regions used by the DT and DTI. Yet the DoE's East of England region – minus Buckinghamshire – was the one with which the DT and DTI aligned themselves (Ward & Tomaney 2002: 111).

The way in which these regional boundaries have come about explains the lack of identity that some feel towards “their” region. Even if, as Keating and Rhodes (1982: 5) point out, it is not necessary for there to be a significant regional identity to ‘advance arguments justifying the establishment of “regional” government,’ one would think that it would be of benefit. As Jeffrey (2006: 65) points out, the English regions are named after the points of a compass; not on the basis of social identification. Insofar as the East of England is concerned, a lack of regional identity is coupled with a lack of coherence as a territorial entity (Ward & Tomaney 2002: 111-113); a similar point in relation to the South West has also been made – it is ‘a contested region’ (Deacon 2004: 215), and one which officials recognise is a ‘figment of the Government imagination’ (interviewee quoted in Deacon 2004: 217).

The fact that there are no clear regional identities has in the past meant that other ‘regions’ have emerged with actors promoting the “region”. Essex County Council is an example: at one time, at least, it believed that Essex could be a region in its own right. The Essex International Brussels Office (EIBO) was opened in 1991 and Essex has further developed its relationships with regions not just in the EU (Picardie in France, Zuid in Holland and Thuringia in Germany), and not just in Central and Eastern European countries who were not then in the EU (Opole and Pomerania in Poland, Pest in Hungary, Arad in Romania), but also with a province in China (Jiangsu) and a state in the US (Virginia). Its status as a self-defined region has not gone uncommented (for example, Butt Philip 1999: 28; Keating 1998: 168).

In terms of the English regions as we now understand them, the South East has been singled out as having particular problems (see John, Musson & Tickell (2002)). Essentially, the South East is defined by what it is not – it is not London, and it is not the South West. In particular, its relationship with London has been seen as critical in terms of the economic prosperity of the region. (A similar point could be made in respect to parts of the East of England (Ward & Tomaney 2002: 110). Yet London has been granted much more political power through its Mayor and Assembly, and is in sharp contrast to the institutionally weak and divided South East. Not surprisingly, it has earned itself the label of ‘England’s Problem Region’ (John, Musson & Tickell 2002: 736, 738). Underlining this is a lack of identity: the current South East has no ‘historical-

geographical imagination' with which to hold the region together (John, Musson & Tickell 2002: 736).

New Labour's 1996 Regional Policy Commission heard evidence to the effect that the local authorities in the South East were unhappy with the "doughnut" shape of the Government Office region. Other problems were: in the East, the traditional East Anglia planning region (Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk) felt that Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, and, 'particularly, Essex', were part of London (RPC 1996: 85); the South West, meanwhile, was generally unhappy with its size, but was unable to come up with a suitable alternative (Regional Planning Commission 1996: 85).

Although, as Tomaney and Ward (2000: 474) point out, regional identity can be difficult to define, this has not stopped some from trying to find some sort of historical justification for a region. In relation to the North East, Tomaney and Ward (2000: 476) argued that it has a strong history of industrialisation and de-industrialisation, an undeveloped technology sector and low level of research and development. This has given rise to unemployment and other economic and social problems that contrast with the south of England, and in particular, the south east of England, which has a well-developed hi-tech sector, and less industry. Furthermore, they went so far as to suggest that the North East has an identity which was inherited from the ninth century Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Northumbria, as well as being an area fought over in the Middle Ages by Scotland and England. This, the argument runs, lends the area, not an English identity, but a *British* identity.

However, it is not entirely obvious how this is distinctive to the modern-day North East, as much of the above could be said to apply to the North West and perhaps to a certain extent the region of Yorkshire and Humberside. Indeed, with such formulations, there is a distinct danger that the North East identity so described may monopolise what it means to be "northern English" generally. Moreover, it can be argued that identity goes beyond the act of simply defining it as such, but is something that is actually *lived*, or experienced, and a social construction. This is a point underlined in Colls and Lancaster's edited book, *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism*, published in 1992 (2nd edition: 2005), in which the North Eastern English (or British) Geordie identity is examined. *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism* captured a renewed interest in North Eastern identity

within the context of the de-industrialisation of the 1980s and opposition to the policies of Margaret Thatcher (Colls & Lancaster 2005: xv), and Colls and Lancaster (2005: xiv) point out that: '[...] regions, no less than nations, are imagined communities. Who the Geordies are depends upon who they imagine themselves to be'. Fortunately, there is plenty of scope, because as the authors also make clear 'there is not and has never been a definitive meaning' to the word "Geordie" (Colls & Lancaster 2005: xiii). The North East region, meanwhile, as a 'terrestrial unity' was something created in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Colls 2005: 3).

It may then reasonably be questioned, for example, the extent to which the ninth century Anglo-Saxon kingdoms that Tomaney and Ward cite have anything to do with the modern day North East, either in terms of an "inheritance" of more significance than other periods in history, or of the *ninth* century kingdom in particular: why not eighth century kingdoms? Unless, of course, it was to justify already preconceived regional boundaries; a conception, it hardly needs pointing out, that was not shared with the post-war standard regions, both the pre- and post-1974, in which the North East does not exist as it was split between Yorkshire and Humberside and the Northern regions (Hogwood 1996: 11-13).

One of the clearer, stronger territorial identities within England is Cornwall, whose "ethnoregionalist nationalism" has been the subject of more than one study (Deacon 2003), and whose uniqueness in having a "grassroots territorialism" and campaigns based on cultural heritage, language and specific economic problems within the context of English regions has been recognised and well rehearsed (Sandford 2005: 34). More recently, a group calling itself Cornish National Liberation Army (CNLA) has emerged. This appears to be an amalgamation of An Gof – responsible for some acts of criminal damage to businesses in the 1980s – and the Cornish Liberation Army, which exists largely in graffiti on walls. To date, however, this new group has only threatened the restaurants belonging to the "outsiders", Rick Stein and Jamie Oliver (Western Morning News, 13 June 2007).

A "regional" identity, then, might not fit the territorial region that central government envisages. Moreover, attempts to justify a particular, centrally-derived region may for the most part be as artificial as the actual region itself: the English regions, to that end,

are largely ‘under construction’ (Deacon 2004: 217). Indeed, the debate over English regions has for the most part centred on ‘how to draw regional boundaries’ (Stanyer 1997: 86), but boundaries that, arguably, fit Government’s purpose.

2.2.2 The Redcliffe-Maud and Kilbrandon Reports

The Redcliffe-Maud Royal Commission on Local Government looked specifically at local government in England outside of London, and sat between 1966 and 1969. The Commission produced a report that, in some cases, called for a quite dramatic re-drawing of county boundaries. At the heart of the Redcliffe-Maud Report was the proposal that there would be fifty-eight unitary authorities, and three, two-tier, metropolitan authorities in Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool.

Redcliffe-Maud also proposed the creation of eight provinces, with Provincial Councils. These Provincial Councils were to develop an overall “strategic plan” for development within the province, one that would provide a planning framework for local authorities, but that would ultimately have to be approved by central government (Royal Commission on Local Government 1969: 109). The Councils would be indirectly elected for the most part, with seventy-five per cent to eighty per cent of the representation on the Council coming from local authorities. The remaining twenty to twenty-five per cent would be “co-opted members”, drawn from industry, universities, trade unions, and commerce (Royal Commission on Local Government 1969: 116). However, the Commission left open the possibility of future devolution to the proposed Provincial Councils and a fully directly elected council (Royal Commission on Local Government 1969: 110).

The principle reason as to why the Commission considered provincial councils at all, let alone the possibility of them being directly elected, was because of a request from a second Commission, the Royal Commission on the Constitution, which was set up just before Redcliffe-Maud was to report (Royal Commission on Local Government 1969: 110; Mallaby 1969: 29). The Kilbrandon Commission, as it became known, was set up to look at wider constitutional issues of the UK in the face of growing Scottish and Welsh demands for devolution (Sanford 2005: 34; Mawson 1998: 160).

Sandford (2005: 33) suggests that 'Kilbrandon proposed directly elected "provinces" in England', as oppose to Redcliffe-Maud, who proposed 'indirectly elected regions'. This is perhaps a misreading, not least because it was Kilbrandon that "preferred the term regional" (Royal Commission on the Constitution 1973: 282) and Redcliffe-Maud the term 'provincial'.

Kilbrandon suggested that there was no demand for directly elected regional assemblies, and that, further, the English people did not want an English Parliament (Royal Commission on the Constitution 1973: 290, 353). Eight of the eleven members of the Commission felt that England should have indirectly elected, "non-executive and advisory councils". The members of these regional councils (as they're referred to elsewhere) would be made up of members indirectly elected by local authorities and central government nominees, following Redcliffe-Maud (Royal Commission on the Constitution 1973: 354) (Two members of the Commission favoured regional assemblies; another one favoured greater devolution to local authorities).

For the most part, Kilbrandon built on the proposals of Redcliffe-Maud. The councils would take on the role of the regional economic planning councils then in operation, as well as to advise and make representations to central government about policy in the regions. Moreover, such councils would play 'an important part in the formulation of the broad economic and land-use strategy which would be the regional framework within which central and local government services would be provided.' Following Redcliffe-Maud, the structure plans of the local authorities would have to fit into this general strategy and would be submitted for Ministerial approval through the regional council and with its comments. Kilbrandon also recommended that such councils should be funded by a local authority precept (Royal Commission on the Constitution 1973: 356).

The artificiality of the English regions was a recognised problem in the Kilbrandon Report of 1973: as one comment in the Report put it, the regional dimension introduces: 'problems of geography in England [...] No drawing of the map would avoid artificiality and, indeed, in relation to some functions, absurdity' (Royal Commission on the Constitution, 1973: 324).

2.3 Economic Regions

By the end of the 1970s, elected regional assemblies for England, Scotland and Wales had been proposed, and the proposals were either not acted upon because of a perceived lack of interest (in the case of England) or were defeated (in the case of Scotland and Wales). One of the consequences of this experience was for the question of regionalisation in England to take what might be called an “economic turn”.

2.3.1 Regional Assemblies

One of the differences between Redcliffe-Maud and Kilbrandon was that, in Redcliffe-Maud, the provincial councils essentially existed for the purposes of planning. Kilbrandon was concerned simultaneously with the congestion within the workings of government which ‘tries to do too much’, as well as a tendency towards centralisation coupled with the remoteness of government. Regional councils, for Kilbrandon, would perhaps go some way towards a solution within England (Royal Commission on the Constitution 1973: 91-92, 292).

Regional dissatisfaction, particularly in Wales and Scotland, led to a commitment in 1968 by the Conservatives under Edward Heath to create a Scottish Assembly, and, later on in office, in 1974, a Welsh Assembly. The Labour Party’s manifesto of 1974 responded with proposed regional assemblies for England, to counter the Scottish and Welsh devolution plans (Mawson 1998: 161). Regional Assemblies for England had been a minority view of two of the Kilbrandon Commissioners – an assembly (for Kilbrandon) differed in that, unlike a regional council, it also had executive and legislative powers (Royal Commission on the Constitution 1973: 281, 353)

Once back in power, however, Labour only published devolution plans for Wales and Scotland, whilst the proposals for English devolution were published in a consultative Green Paper, largely because of a lack of interest in regional assemblies in England. The single bill to establish Welsh and Scottish devolution had failed, and individual bills for Wales and Scotland were only passed in 1978 with Liberal support, and only then on the

proviso that there were to be referenda in Wales and Scotland. These referenda, in 1979, failed (Mawson 1998: 161). This, coupled with the public's apathy for regional assemblies in England, meant that Margaret Thatcher, after the 1979 election, could quickly kill off the issue (Mawson 1998: 164). Moreover, the closure in 1979/1980 of the REPCs by the newly elected Conservative Government began an assault on local government and regional administration in the UK in general and England in particular (see for example Butt Philip, 1999). Reflecting a general pessimism about regions in England, two commentators writing in 1982 remarked that: "the significance of standard regions as anything except areas for statistical purposes must now be in question" (Hogwood & Lindley 1982: 24).

2.3.2 An Alternative Approach

Labour's 1982 *Alternative Regional Strategy* was the product of a working group under the chairmanship of John Prescott. It has, as Mawson has pointed out, essentially formed the basis for New Labour's regional policy in the 1990s (Mawson 1998: 165).

Against the backdrop of economic difficulties that Britain was experiencing at the time, the *Alternative Regional Strategy* called for regional assemblies and regional development agencies to regenerate the regions: each of the regional assemblies was to 'supervise a regional development agency' (Prescott 1982: 8). Essentially, it was proposed that these regional assemblies would formulate regional plans that would cover the areas of the economy, environment, transport and social services.

In terms of the regional assemblies, the proposals outlined ideas similar to those of the Redcliffe-Maud and Kilbrandon Reports: they would, for example, be responsible for drawing up 'regional development plans' that would take into account both the region and sub-regions. Related to 'national guidelines,' these plans would include a spatial element, and would need the approval of the 'relevant Minister or Secretary of State'. Most of public expenditure would still be decided at national level, although there would be 'a block allocation of funds to the region' that would allow 'some flexibility in shifting resources between policy areas.' The proposed regional development agencies would also submit their plans to the assembly, which would in turn incorporate these plans into its regional development plans (Prescott 1982: 22-23).

It was noted that these proposals accommodated two factors in particular: the first was a commitment to the establishment of unitary authorities which – in the view of the working group – would necessitate regional administrations in any case. Secondly, a commitment to Scottish devolution also ‘requires [...] comparable reforms in all regions of the UK’ (Prescott 1982: 28).

In the first place, the assemblies were to have been indirectly elected, being made up of local authorities, as well as members from trade unions and industry. Later, the assemblies were to be directly elected, following the reorganisation of local government into unitary authorities. It suggested that the interim assemblies would be funded through a local authority levy and/or central government (Prescott 1982: 8, 28).

One of the impetuses for regional assemblies was to hold the growing number of agencies to account, which eroded the powers of local authorities: there had been a ‘long term erosion of local authority powers under successive governments, with central government and unaccountable quangos playing an ever-increasing part in our national life’ (Prescott 1982: 23).

On the face of it, the argument that Scottish devolution would require English regional reform is a similar one to the one put forward in the sixties and seventies. It also has echoes all the way back to Gladstone, via Fawcett, of course (see above). The key difference is the introduction of regional development agencies, which brought into the equation an economic dimension that had been missing before. Indeed, economics is one of the main issues in the *Alternative Regional Strategy*, which also contained within its analysis an examination of current practice. For example, the emerging Enterprise Boards in the West Midlands and Lancashire, and the setting up of an innovation centre by the city council in Hull, were used as examples of councils setting up innovation centres, creating science parks to provide facilities for ‘small high technology companies while at the same time taking advantage of university research facilities’. Training initiatives in Sheffield and Manchester were also cited (Prescott 1982: 24-25).

One of the reasons why the devolution proposals of the earlier Callaghan Government had failed was because of strong objections voiced by MPs from the north of England.

They viewed parts of the north of England as having similar economic problems that Scotland had, and feared that a more assertive Scotland would benefit from a greater allocation of resources at the expense of the English regions. Given this, it was hardly surprising that '[t]he North West and Northern Labour Parties are now demanding regional government' (Prescott: 1982: 10, 16). It also underlined the importance of at least an economic settlement with the English regions if the Labour Party were to continue with their support for Scottish devolution.

The interest in regional government within the Labour Party in the north grew during the 1980s, and the impact on the national party was that the 1992 Labour Party election manifesto contained a commitment to regional government. John Smith, as Labour Leader, emphasised his commitment to regional government on visits to the North East (Tomaney 1999: 76).

The 1980s saw a growing interest in devolving economic governance at least to the regional level. The SDP-Liberal Alliance in 1987, taking the Scottish Development Agency (set up in 1975) as a role model, advocated the setting up of regional development agencies that would eventually be accountable to elected regional assemblies, and published their proposals in *Turning the Tide of Decline in the Regions*. The agencies would plan spending on infrastructure, create links with banks and universities, and co-ordinate the work of local authorities and the regional offices of government departments, as well liaise with other regions, local communities and – something not mentioned in Labour's *Alternative Strategy* – the EU. The aim of these particular proposals, however, is clear: economic regeneration of the English regions by other means than merely giving regional aid (Bosanquet 1987: 18, 22).

Regional assemblies in *Turning the Tide* are only mentioned in passing, and then only very briefly, without elaboration of constitution of these assemblies, or functions, other than to hold the development agencies to account. The focus of the pamphlet, moreover, is overwhelmingly on the northern regions (the North West, North East and Yorkshire and Humberside), which are clearly seen as the "problem" regions. These proposals are not driven by any principles of devolution. Nevertheless, it does exemplify the extent to which regions had taken an 'economic' turn, as oppose to one based on planning or a wider constitutional settlement. It also highlights, perhaps, the extent to which Labour

was still committed to a wider constitutional settlement – a point to which we will return below.

2.3.3 The Government Offices for the Regions (GOs)

The Conservative governments of the 1980s did not end regional-level thinking, despite the closure of the REPCs and the killing off of any devolution plans for Wales and Scotland. To begin with, as Hogwood (1996) found, privatisation did not mean the complete end of regional structures. During the 80s and the 90s, water, waste, electricity, gas, and the telecommunications industries, were all privatised. Although British Telecom never had a regional structure, electricity was still provided by fourteen regional companies, and the subsequent consumer regulation authorities that were created reflected the existing regional structures. The twelve regional Councillors on the Gas Consumers Council were left stranded without corresponding regions after the gas regions were abolished in 1993, however. Again, different industries, consumer councils and regulatory bodies had different understandings of what English regions were (Hogwood 1996: 28-29).

This was further complicated by the creation of “arm’s-length” agencies, such as the Highways Agency, the Benefits Agency, the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and the Employment Service. These added to the fragmentation of the public realm that lacked regional co-ordination (Mawson & Spencer 1997: 74). Moreover, during the years of Conservative governments, local authorities also found that their powers, for example, in education, were diminished (Hogwood 1996: 269). This, along with the need for more effective handling of issues pertaining to regional development and inward investment, created a demand for a region-based response by government (Mawson 1998: 162).

Another factor which was creating pressure for a regional level response was urban regeneration. The Audit Commission, in a 1989 report, had found duplication and a lack of formal relationships between local authorities and central government. Moreover, there was an increasing awareness of the usefulness to policy makers for expenditure by region, and an increasing awareness of the problems of policy coordination at regional

level, given that the civil service was ‘centralised and compartmentalised’ (Mawson & Spencer 1997: 74).

European Structural Funds encouraged the Conservative government of the 90s into thinking about regions and regional strategies, in order that bids could be put together for the 1994-2000 period and implement the funding won. In particular, the reforms of the EU’s Structural Funds in 1988 and 1993 had introduced the “partnership principle” and emphasised the need for a partnership between the state, the private sector and the Commission (Gough 2003: 31). This put pressure on the Treasury to think in terms of regions (Mawson 1998: 162). Indeed, it is said to have been responsible for fostering “economic regionalism” in England (Gough 2003: 32).

The extent to which this was a *significant* pressure in the regionalisation of England is one to which we shall return in Chapter Four, however. For now, it is enough to note that European funding had indeed moved decisively towards a regional approach, and this in turn put a degree of pressure on England, which lacked a region-based infrastructure.

These pressures formed a backdrop to the setting up, in April of 1994, of the Government Offices for the Regions (GOs) by the Conservative government. They were set up to cover the then ten English regions (Merseyside, with EU Objective One funding, had its own GO). These were an amalgamation of the Departments of the Environment, Employment, and of Trade and Industry; in 1995, the Department of Education was also brought in, following its merger with the Department of Employment. This was in part a government strategy to streamline services, offering ‘one-stop shop’ style services to firms and local authorities. Initially, the GOs were set up to deal mostly with the Single Regeneration Budget, as well as European funding, TECs, and the establishment of Business Links (Mawson 1998: 162; Sandford 2005: 42-43). Sandford (2005: 42) in particular argues that this was not ‘rediscovery of the English regions by the centre’ but ‘emphatically an administrative convenience’. The Single Regeneration Budget might be seen as an example of this – it merged twenty different smaller budgets aimed at local (note: not regional) regeneration budgets.

The GOs had six objectives which New Labour's 1996 Regional Policy Commission (RPC 1996: 87) identified:

- To achieve the operational requirements of departments and Ministers
- To contribute local views and experience to the formation of policy
- To promote a coherent approach to competitiveness, sustainable economic development and regeneration
- To develop both the skills and methods for staff to help them with these tasks
- To develop local partnerships with local interests to help achieve these objectives
- To be a single point of access and deliver services on Citizen Charter principles

GOs brought together under single management environmental, land use, infrastructure, economic development and regeneration policy instruments (Mawson & Spencer 1997: 83). The creation of the GOs was also seen by New Labour Regional Policy Commission as 'an attempt to head off the pressure for genuine regional government' (Regional Policy Commission 1996: 90), and were also to remain accountable to Ministers in sponsoring departments, rather than a single Minister at Cabinet level with overall regional responsibility (Regional Policy Commission 1996: 82).

The role of the GOs was strengthened between 2000 and 2001; departments that were brought together in the GOs in 2001 were the Departments of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Culture, Media and Sport; Transport, Local Government and Regions; Trade and Industry; Education and Skills and the Home Office, and were seen as 'important' players in the region, even if with a 'low profile' (Tomaney 2002a: 36). This followed the recommendation of the Regional Policy Commission (Regional Policy Commission 1996: 87)

The original purpose of the GOs does seem to be to give a regional perspective on national policy. But there was general confusion as to the exact role of the GOs, whether it was to represent national government at regional level, or to form a regional administration and represent the region at national level. In practice, they strengthened the presence of central government in the regions and improved decisions at the regional level for those departments involved with the GOs (Mawson & Spencer 1997: 77, 79). However, the GOs did not initially include all government departments that had a

regional focus, nor did they include all of the so-called 'Next Step agencies,' such as the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency (Mawson & Spencer 1997: 80).

While it might seem that the creation of GOs was a step forward in the story of English regions, Sandford argues that 'GOs are and were emphatically an administrative convenience rather than a rediscovery of the regions by the centre' (Sandford 2005: 42). Sandford makes the point that many of the areas of GO responsibility – SRB in the 90s, and indeed much of the current GO activity – have a *local*, not regional, focus. The programs serve local areas within a particular region, rather than the region overall. Moreover, the funding the GOs receive is for individual programmes; when these end, so does the funding. The GOs were – and are – not in receipt of a budget to spend on the region, and do not administer funds that cater for the region as whole.

2.4 New Labour, regionalisation and constitutional reform

It was related above how, by the end of the 1970s, the Labour Party was committed to Scottish devolution, and it was argued that as a result of this commitment, a wider settlement in respect of England was needed. It was suggested that at this juncture, the region as an economic unit came to prominence. This was for two reasons: the first, as Mawson (1997: 161) pointed out, was to reassure northern MPs in particular that they would not lose out to a potentially more assertive Scotland, following devolution; secondly, there was a potential economic solution to the economic problems in some parts of England. These strands came together in Labour's *Alternative Regional Strategy*.

New Labour, on the other hand, has taken a more cautious approach – and offered cautious leadership – on the issue of English regions. It is one lacking in an overall clear English regional agenda, and has been taken to be a good example of 'New Labour policy ambivalence' (Sandford 2005: 96) that lies at the heart of New Labour. On the one hand, there is the "third way", which is often seen as something between neo-liberalism and socialism; between Thatcherism and the Keynesian welfare state; between Thatcher's tendencies to centralise power and the desire for greater citizen involvement. On the

other hand, there is also the influence of “old” Labour and the policies that New Labour inherited (Sandford 2005: 96).

2.4.1 New Labour and the constitution

The Labour Party itself underwent change, particularly under Tony Blair, in the 1990s, and was elected in 1997 as New Labour. This has prompted a debate about the extent to which New Labour is *new* (and, indeed, Labour) (see for example Rubinstein (1997)). New Labour’s program of constitutional reform is in fact a case in point.

The New Labour government claimed, in the *Scotland’s Parliament* white paper, that it was “committed to a comprehensive programme of constitutional reform” (SO, 1997: preface). Flinders (2005: 64) makes the point that no fewer than *twenty* bills concerning constitutional reform were put to the House of Commons *within the first three years* of New Labour coming to power in 1997. Significant constitutional reforms include granting the Bank of England independence; the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into the British legal system; the Freedom of Information Act; the abolition of the right of hereditary peers to sit in the House of Lords; and the abolition of the Lord Chancellor’s Office (Flinders 2004: 128-129; Bogdanor 2005: 75-76). It is within this context that Scottish and Welsh devolution occurred, and a mechanism put in place by which English regions could choose to have an elected assembly.

Flinders argues that constitutional reform itself does not figure as part of the “Third way”, nor that it is entirely clear how it relates to the New Labour “project” over all. Rather, he views the “third way” as essentially New Labour’s approach to social and economic policies: an approach based on outcomes and results, rather than an underlying philosophical principle (Flinders 2004: 139-140).

Flinders also argues that constitutional reform has largely been cosmetic. Fundamentally, New Labour has continued the traditional Labour commitment to the Westminster model of government in which the absolute sovereignty of Parliament is

upheld (Flinders 2004: 143; Sandford 2005: 101) – constitutional reform therefore ‘cannot be interpreted as a fundamental paradigm shift’ (Flinders 2004: 143).

Bogdanor suggests that it is precisely the absolute sovereignty of Parliament that has potentially been threatened by the creation of the Scottish Parliament. Simply, in practice, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for the Westminster Parliament to have its way over the Scottish Parliament as, politically, the Scottish Parliament represents Scottish opinion; the political cost for Westminster to ignore this would be far too high. Westminster has become, on this reading, a “quasi-federal” parliament where both Wales and Scotland are concerned (Bogdanor 1999: 185-186; 2005: 85).

Nevertheless, it is certain that the commitment to Scottish and Welsh devolution can be seen to be an inheritance from “old” Labour, as can the consequent commitments to establish regional development agencies in England. On the issue of regional assemblies, there was uncertainty, perhaps in recognition of the lack of public support. It has also been pointed out that, if anything, those at the heart of New Labour were sceptical about devolution in general and any attempts to create English regional government in particular; in part because New Labour recognised that there was little public support for English regional government (Sandford 2005: 96; Tomaney 1999: 78). Regional assemblies were mostly ignored between 2000 and 2004 (Sandford 2005: 97). The most prominent Government figure associated with New Labour’s English regional project was the then Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott: he has, in Sandford’s (2005: 97) view, been ‘the sole source of unequivocal support for elected assemblies in the English regions’. This about the author of “old” Labour’s *Alternative Regional Strategy* can hardly come as any surprise.

Tomaney (1999) suggests that it was precisely Blair’s uncertainty on the commitment to regional government, inherited from John Smith, that led to him calling for a policy review in 1995, following Major’s attack on specifically New Labour’s plans as a threat to the UK. The review led to the production of two policy papers, in 1995 and 1996, which ultimately argued for the setting up of regional chambers and outlined more fully the proposals for regional development agencies (Tomaney 1999: 76-77).

2.4.2 The Regional Development Agencies

In 1996, the Regional Policy Commission that had been set up by John Prescott and chaired by Bruce Millan, published their report, which fleshed out the proposals for RDAs in each of the regions (Regional Policy Commission 1996: 33). There was, it said, an economic justification for a regional policy. Firstly, by promoting economically competitive regions, the national economy overall would be competitive; secondly it would promote more efficient use of resources (although it was not explained exactly how); thirdly, ‘sustainable non-inflationary growth’ would be made possible, because, it was suggested, there would be a move away from a single, national, economic policy that would stop economic ‘overheating’ in the South East to the detriment of the other regions. Fourthly, and finally, it would attract foreign inward investment – although, again, it was not made entirely clear why this would happen (Regional Policy Commission 1996: 10).

It was proposed that the regional chambers should appoint the board members of the RDA, and that the RDA act as the ‘executive arm’ of the chambers (Regional Policy Commission 1996: 33, 34). Furthermore, ‘Regional Skills Agencies’ would be set up and placed under the chambers and not the RDAs as one might perhaps have expected (RPC 1996: 104). Interestingly, the Commission appears to have had in mind a stronger role for the Chambers than actually transpired (see below).

The RDAs were duly set up in 1999, and the creation of voluntary regional chambers (see below) was also encouraged. The chambers were to have an oversight role of the RDAs, and the RDAs were instructed to take into account the views of the Chambers (Regional Policy Commission 1996; Tomaney 2002a: 25, 32).

It had already been proposed that Labour should make uniform the administrative regions for the Employment Service, English Partnerships (also established in April 1994), and the Rural Development Commission, and the proposed RDAs were to use the same regional boundaries (Regional Policy Commission, 1996: 84, 59); indeed, they absorbed the Rural Development Commission and most of the English Partnerships (Sandford 2005: 48). Rather than the Regional Chambers appointing the board

members of the RDAs, however, as proposed, the Secretary of State retained that power under the 1998 Regional Development Agency Act (Sandford 2005: 48).

The RDAs were initially under the ODPM as the sponsoring department; however, since 2002, they have come under the DTI – the significance of which will be shown below (Tomaney 2002a: 75; Sanford 2005: 109).

To begin with, the RDAs were perceived to suffer from a lack of resources to have any impact on regional problems, plus their budgets were ‘departmentalised,’ with each department having their own objectives. A significant proportion of the RDAs budgets were tied up in the Single Regeneration Budget, the responsibility for which they took from the Government Offices (Tomaney 2002a: 29; Sanford 2005: 48; 114).

There are five functions of RDAs: economic development and regeneration; promotion of business efficiency; investment and competitiveness; promotion of employment; enhancement of employment skills; and to contribute to sustainable development. A key task is the production of a Regional Economic Strategy (RES) (Lynch 1999: 75).

As a result of the 2000 Spending Review, the RDAs were given “single pot” funding (from April 2002), which itself has increased year on year. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, also announced in 2000 that a new Strategic Programme which set out how objectives and targets set for the RDAs would be achieved, so the focus was now on policy outcomes rather than on financial inputs. (Tomaney 2002b: 724; Sanford 2005: 114, 119).

A further strengthening of RDAs occurred in 2004, when the Single Regeneration Budget was wound down, but the levels of funding remained the same, allowing for extra monies for regional projects. They also took on some of the work of the Countryside Agency and were permitted to lead the new Regional Skills Partnerships (Sandford 2005: 114).

This change of focus – from input to output – is also one that has been seen as one associated with Treasury’s growing dominance in economic matters – the emergence of the “Treasury agenda”. If there was an “economic turn” in the 1970s and 1980s to English regionalisation, then there was also what might be seen as a “regional turn” by

the Treasury in the 1990s. In particular, the Treasury had become increasingly interested in how the regions can deliver (national) economic policy, even if their focus remains solely on economic development and regeneration. The significance of the change in sponsoring department from ODPM to DTI is made all the more apparent – the DTI ‘has increasingly become a creature of the Treasury’ (Sandford 2005: 110; 115) and increasingly sidelined the DTI as the department of economic affairs (Tomaney & Hetherington 2003: 51). The consequence of this, as will be seen in Chapter Four and Five, is an increased interest in matters regional by the Treasury.

The rhetoric used to underpin the creation of the RDAs at best reflects that of New Regionalism, if not directly inspired by it. To begin with, New Regionalism highlights the role of the region in economic governance. It emphasises industrial clusters and the importance of proximity for innovation as an aid to greater competitiveness. This is seen as necessary in order to “compete” in the global economy and in turn leads to greater prosperity (Webb & Collis 2000: 860). It is, in other words, concerned with “supply-side” intervention, and the RDAs may be seen as part of a regional supply-side architecture (Jones and MacLeod 1999: 301).

The RDAs also mirror the proposals of the 1982 *Alternative Strategy*, and therefore represent an ‘old’ Labour inheritance. Mawson (1998: 162) reveals that the promise of RDA quickly introduced to the English regions meant that the forty or so northern English MPs would not attempt to block the planned Scottish and Welsh devolution, demonstrating that Blair was not going to make the same mistake that Callaghan in the seventies had (see also Ward & Tomaney 2000: 477).

2.4.3 The Regional Chambers

Regional Chambers, later (and confusingly) renamed as ‘Regional Assemblies’, were set up 1999. They are made up mostly of local authorities, whose representation on the Chamber can account for anywhere between 63% (in Yorkshire and Humberside and the East Midlands) to 75% (in the South West). The remaining members are ‘social and economic partners’, drawn from trade unions, environment groups, faith groups, businesses, universities, and so on. Principally they exist to monitor (or scrutinise) the activity of RDAs, although the RDAs are actually answerable to Whitehall. The

Chambers have also represented their region in disputes with central government and general policy integration (Tomaney 2002a: 33-34; Lynch 1999: 75).

In contrast to the recommendations of New Labour's 1996 Regional Policy Commission, moreover, the Chambers do not appoint the board of the RDAs. Neither are they statutory organisations as was widely expected, but voluntary; not every region is required to have one (Sandford 2005: 50). They have instead been seen as a 'sop to advocates of elected assemblies' (Sandford 2005: 49).

In 2003, legislation was passed to allow referenda to take place in three regions to decide whether or not the region should have a fully elected regional assembly. In the event, only one referendum took place, in the North East in November of 2004, and this was defeated, effectively ending the government's plans for elected regional assemblies for the foreseeable future (Bogdanor, 2005: 75, 94).

The proposed expansion of powers to a fully elected regional assembly was in fact rather moderate, if not disingenuous as Sandford (2005: 62-63) points out. For example, it was proposed that elected assemblies would be given responsibilities for the environment, transport, skills, culture, crime reduction and public health. Yet, as Sandford argues, these would in fact be "virtual powers", as the executive agencies involved – and their budgets – would remain *outside* of the assembly. The "responsibility" would therefore amount to the writing of a strategy. This, Sandford correctly asserts, goes against the aspirations set out at the beginning of the 2002 White Paper that initially outlined the proposals, and which talked about "giving regions the freedoms to make their own judgements about the region's needs and priorities" (DTLR 2002: 20; Sandford 2005: 63). The elected regional assembly would mainly be concerned with the RDAs and regional housing budgets, which would account for ninety per cent of their budgets (Sandford 2005: 65).

Here, then, is another echo of the *Alternative Regional Strategy* – the regional assembly, when fully elected, would take control of the RDAs. And, of course, the fact that they are indirectly elected with a vague possibility that they may become fully elected, and include a small number of members drawn from other social and economic

actors, is reminiscent of the proposals put forward in Kilbrandon and Redcliffe-Maud (see above).

There have been two significant enhancements of the role of the Chambers. The first came in 2001, when there was a significant increase in the budget of the Chambers: £500,000 each year for each Chamber for three years was allocated, and they were invited to submit bids explaining how the money would be spent. This was coupled with extra funding to take on a regional planning role (Sandford 2005: 54-55). Secondly, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act of 2004 changed the planning regime and legally obliged Chambers – as Regional Planning Boards – to monitor planning conformity, as well as develop a Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), which allowed for greater strategic coordination. This signalled the seriousness with which central government accepted their role as an important regional actor and as a “voice of the region” – a role that they themselves had largely invented (Sandford 2005: 123, 124).

Again, however, regional development plans – both spatial and economic aspects – that formed a strategic overview were part of the proposals put forward in both Kilbrandon and the *Alternative Regional Strategy*, and these were ideas that were easily adapted to the more recent New Labour thinking.

There is one significant difference. Redcliffe-Maud argued for unitary councils; when the *Alternative Regional Strategy* was being written, it was assumed that this would have happened by the time a Labour government was elected – indeed, it was cited as a factor for having regional assemblies (Prescott, 1982: 28). However, the creation of unitary authorities has been piecemeal. This meant that, along with a vote for an elected regional assembly, there also needed to be reform of local government within that region.

The plans for elected regional assemblies were developed by the ODPM (Sandford 2005: 120), and might be seen as the “ODPM agenda” as against the “Treasury agenda” that was increasingly dominating the RDAs – broadly, the one agenda being concerned with democracy, the other with economics.

Reform of local government may in part explain the general lack of enthusiasm for elected regional assemblies within government, as the proposed reforms of local

government were themselves controversial (Sandford 2005: 65). Either way, it has been noted that, following what amounted to a devastating defeat for Government policy, there was no attempt to defend elected regional assemblies, not even by the ODPM, and the focus switched to other forms of decentralisation, rather than devolution (Sandford 2005: 66).

2.5 Conclusion

New Labour's English regionalisation project cannot be divorced from, in the first place, its commitment to Scottish devolution, and in particular its desire to assuage northern-based MPs. From the beginning, then, it was more of a technocratic, top-down solution. This in part is shown by the artificial nature of the boundaries of the regions themselves, and is compounded by any coherent feeling of regional identity within England overall. In fact, one of the few areas in England with such an identity – Cornwall – was not considered to be in itself a 'region' that fits with any views in government of what English regions should look like – a point that underlines the top-down approach.

What this survey also shows, however, is that New Labour's agenda for English regions is part of a much longer debate about a 'regional' level in England. This has taken various forms over the last century, from a 'political fix' as part of a wider UK constitutional problem, posed by a growing sense of Scottish nationalism, to one demanded by planners and increasing complexity. In the end, these strands came together with Labour; with its focus on an economic agenda for English regions, it was able to achieve its longstanding objective for Scottish devolution without the opposition from the northern-based MPs.

Nevertheless, New Labour did not simply implement inherited ideas. Perhaps perceiving a lack of public interest in regional government, New Labour neither retained the commitments made in the *Alternative Strategy*, nor those made as late as the 1992 election. Rather, two agendas came to dominate New Labour thinking. The first might be said to represent the New Labour inheritance – the "ODPM agenda" that established the RDAs and regional chambers in the first place, and pushed for fully elected regional assemblies. This agenda failed on 4th November, 2004. However, there was the second,

economic-based, agenda, one which would be taken over by the Treasury and represents a “regional turn” by the Treasury. This was a national policy that had a regional focus in order to bring national economic benefits.

New Labour ultimately found that it did not actually “need” *elected* regional assemblies for its economic policies; this was coupled with a longstanding recognition that there was a lack of interest among the public for such bodies – especially ones tied in with largely unwelcome reforms to local government. Elected regional assemblies were thus consigned to being ‘a minor footnote in the Labour constitutional reform programme’ (Sandford 2005: 1). Regionalisation, however, was not.

3. Europeanisation and the English Regions

In this chapter, I shall examine the influence – if any – of the European Union (EU) on the process of regionalisation within England. The argument has been made that EU structural funding has had a critical role in the formation of an English regional tier (Burch & Gomez 2004); on the other hand, other scholars, such as Sandford (2005: 17), are largely dismissive of the influence of EU integration on the process of English regionalisation.

Börzel (2001: 137) has claimed the ‘link between Europeanization and regionalization of the nation-state is no longer contested’. However, Europeanisation itself is a problematic concept, as shall be shown, and (as Börzel herself goes on to say) the ‘concrete impact of European integration on the territorial structures of the member states [is] highly controversial’ (Börzel 2001: 137)

I shall make the case that Sandford (2005) is probably correct to dismiss the EU as a *critical* influence on the development of an English regional tier of governance. In making this argument, I am not arguing that Europeanisation has had no effect; indeed, it will be shown that Europeanisation had an effect on the early beginnings of regionalisation in England. The argument is, however, that the effect is marginal to the point that EU membership was not a necessary condition for the rise in English regionalisation.

3.1 Europeanisation as a process

It is in the process of Europeanisation, according to one recent formulation by Sturm and Dieringer (2005), that ‘nation-states form substate units’ (Sturm & Dieringer 2005:

282). The authors argue that Europeanisation puts pressure on nation-states to form sub-state units because, firstly, of regional needs and regional expectations; secondly, because of constitutional reforms initiated by the drive for greater efficiency by the nation-state; and, thirdly, perceived EU pressures at both the national and regional level. However, just as the forming of 'substate units' is not restricted EU Member States, two of the three of the reasons cited for 'substate units' to be 'formed' in the Europeanisation process (regional aspirations and constitutional reform), are also by no means restricted to European countries, so, on the face of it, it is not entirely clear what difference "Europeanisation" makes.

Nevertheless, the point remains that there is a perceived link between Europeanisation as a process on the one hand, and regionalisation on the other.

Europeanisation – in Sturm and Dieringer's view – does not alone *create* ('form') the 'substate units'; that depends

'on the answer to the question as to which political influence (the regional, the national or the European) sees chances for new resources and new powers, *as well as on the rules of this "territorial game" defined by national political cultures, regional institutions and societies*' (Sturm & Dieringer 2005: 282; my emphasis)

The last caveat quoted is particularly noteworthy; it suggests that the rules of the "territorial game" might mean that Europeanisation does not, after all, form the 'substate units' which they otherwise appear to suggest *would* result from the process. Presumably, a 'national political culture' of strong, central government, might, for example, withstand any pressures from Europeanisation. The authors also appear to suggest that the "territorial game" is not one defined at the European level, but at the national and regional levels (leaving aside for a moment the otherwise intriguing word 'societies'). On that basis, one wonders if "Europeanisation" is not a misleading term, even if one has decided what precisely Europeanisation does contribute to the process of regionalisation.

There have been a number of attempts by scholars to define Europeanisation, and this alerts us to a key problem. It is – in the oft-cited words of Olsen (2001: 1) – ‘a fashionable but contested concept’; elsewhere it is described as ‘a relatively new field of study and, as such, characterised by disputes over definitions and approaches’ (Bache & Marshall 2004: 13). Indeed, it has even forced political scientists to consider what is meant by the word “concept”, the elements that make up a concept, and how concepts should be applied. To this end, Buller and Gamble (2002), for example, provide us with a useful discussion of the work of Gerring and Sator, and attempt a ‘critical survey’ (Buller & Gamble 2002: 2) of the literature in order to relate Europeanisation to the criteria that Gerring has specified with respect to the idea of a “concept”. Yet it is typical of the Europeanisation debate that Buller and Gamble examine five different definitions, dismiss them all, and propose a sixth, even if apparently reluctant to do so (Buller & Gamble 2002: 32).

Europeanisation is not necessarily related to European integration or to the Member States of the EU. Olsen (2001: 4) makes the point that there are other ‘transnational regimes,’ and European-level institutions, besides those of the EU, have affected some kind of transformation on the states of Western Europe. And as Bulmer and Radaelli (2004: 15) also point out, candidate countries to the EU can also experience Europeanisation before joining the Union – they ‘import, imitate and absorb’ EU policies, or ‘play a game of catch-up’ through their negotiation of the *acquis communautaire*. So Europeanisation is not necessarily restricted to either individual members of the EU or to the EU as a whole, nor, indeed, to the geographical space known as Europe. To pick an extreme example, if Taiwan were to use the EU’s model of economic integration in its relations with China, as mooted by President Chen Shui-Bien, this could by one reading conceivably mean that Taiwan becomes Europeanised (*China Post*, 29 July 2004; see also Gamble and Buller 2002: 14). Nevertheless, we have to concede with Olsen (2001: 4) that ‘[t]he EU is currently the core political project in Europe and the example most often analysed in the literature on Europeanization.’ It seems therefore to make sense that those engaged in the business of defining Europeanisation restrict its use to within the EU. In this, we begin to follow Radaelli in providing a “dictionary meaning” of a systematised concept for the specialist, rather than an “encyclopaedia approach”, which would ‘report on all the major meanings associated with the concept’ (Radaelli 2004: 5).

We can perhaps say what Europeanisation is not – it is not a theory of European integration. Europeanisation can be described as an approach rather than a theory. Radaelli tells us that Europeanisation is “mostly interested in adaptation,” not “making bold predictions”, which would be expected from a theory (Radaelli 2004: 5, 10). Theories of European integration, meanwhile, tend to describe events purely at the *European* level. Little attention has traditionally been paid to the impact of the European integration process on domestic politics. A move to study this impact has coincided with growing consensus that the EU is neither an intergovernmental regime, nor a super-state in the making, but a complex multi-level organisation without precedent. The debate between Intergovernmentalists on the one hand and Neo-functionalists on the other seems to have ended (Buller and Gamble, 2002: 11).

For Radaelli, Europeanisation is both a process and a way of organising existing concepts in political science to add cumulative research. Analysing the amount of domestic change in a Member State allows us to say something about the effect of Europeanisation. The challenge is to decide if the domestic change that has been observed is genuinely the result of Europeanisation, and not, for example, caused by globalisation or domestic politics. The question to be asked is: would these changes have taken place without Europeanisation? (Radaelli 2004: 10). This is harder than it seems, as other scholars have pointed out, including Radaelli, while Featherstone has described the question of causality as a ‘key point’ (Radaelli 2004: 10; Olsen 2001: 11; see also Featherstone 2004: 11-12).

As a process, Europeanisation has been shown to have varied effects in different policy areas and in different countries (Buller & Gamble 2002: 19). Bulmer and Radaelli (2004: 4-8) offer four patterns of governance that characterise the EU and the dynamics through which Europeanisation operates, three of which directly affect domestic politics: governance by hierarchy (positive integration), governance by hierarchy (negative integration), and facilitated coordination.

Governance by hierarchy occurs when supranational institutions put into effect, and enforce, European legislation that has been agreed at the negotiation stage. This can occur through positive integration, when rules governing a particular policy area, such as

pollution levels, are agreed upon, and the Europeanised policy is ‘downloaded’ to the Member States.

Governance by hierarchy may also be achieved through negative integration, where perhaps barriers are removed (for example, discrimination by nationality) to enable the market to function, or decisions are made as to whether a particular merger between two companies can go ahead. This is associated with a more horizontal process simply because member states may seek to emulate other member states in creating the conditions in which businesses flourish.

Facilitated coordination refers to policy areas that are still subject to control by national government, or where a policy needs unanimity, or where the EU is just a space to exchange ideas. Most of these policies are covered by the Open Method of Cooperation (OMC), but also include police cooperation and foreign policy. The OMC was agreed at the Lisbon 2000 European Council: as point 37 of the Presidency Conclusions puts it: Implementation of the strategic goal will be facilitated by applying a new open method of coordination as the means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals’. It involves setting timetables and guidelines for the EU to achieve short-, medium-, and long-term goals as well as encouraging ways to compare best practice. This should then be filtered down into national and regional policies ‘taking into account national and regional differences’ (Presidency Conclusions, Lisbon 2000).

The EU institutions are weak in these areas, and agreements are reached either through political declarations that are not in any way legally binding, or by ‘soft law’: rules that are not legally enforceable. Agreements reached here result in Europeanisation, but not one that is imposed. Rather, it is more “horizontal” – occurring between Member States - rather than “top-down” from the EU institutional level to Member States.

Kohler-Koch (2002) has made a useful contribution with regard to regional policy and on the effect of policy networks on Europeanisation. Policy networks would seem to be important to the concept of Europeanisation because it is in networks that policy learning takes place, and where ideas can be ‘Europeanised’ (Bulmer & Radaelli 2004: 11). Kohler-Koch reminds us that there is near agreement by researchers that networks

and ideas were crucial to the success of the EU's regional policy. It was through networks, which bring together chambers of commerce, representatives of agriculture, environmental groups and the like, that EU regional policy, according to Kohler-Koch, was able to contribute "to an upgrading of the 'third-level government'," despite the wishes of Member State governments (Kohler-Koch 2002: 1-2).

It has been argued that trans-national networks emerge when the EU moves into a new area of competence, and are important in not just the formulation but also the implementation of policy (Kohler-Koch 2002: 5). However, Kohler-Koch suggests otherwise, and provides evidence to show that 'trans-national policy networks have not been the most prominent transmission belt for transporting European concepts' (Kohler-Koch 2002: 7). For her, impact studies (carried out presumably at the national level) will lead us to believe that ideas come down from the EU level. However, '[l]ooking for parallel developments at other levels, that is at the international and domestic level, may give a more realistic picture" (Kohler-Koch 2002: 10). If Kohler-Koch is right, and if this otherwise classic example of Europeanisation (which might be termed 'ideational convergence') fails to produce domestic change, then, as others have pointed out, this must throw into question the effectiveness of OMC as a vehicle for creating domestic change (Bulmer & Radaelli 2004: 11).

Buller and Gamble (2002: 21-22) have also criticised the idea of Europeanisation as a process in the manner described above. Essentially, it does not address what the process actually *is*, only the apparent *effect*. For example, we might note that regional governments in Spain are starting to behave in the same way as German Länder, apparently in response to EU pressure. The question that Buller and Gamble ask is, does this apparent convergence amount to Europeanisation? They claim that this question is not even asked, let alone addressed.

Governance by negotiation is the fourth pattern of governance delineated by Bulmer and Radaelli (2004: 4). European policy is derived through negotiation, which in turn exposes policy to Europeanisation. Whether setting targets in employment policy, or making a legally binding decision in an area of exclusive authority, such as the internal market, all of these come about through a process of negotiation. This is a process in which Member State governments are prominent, either indirectly, by having set the

terms in which the EU institutions act, or by themselves directly, engaging in the policy-making process.

This can be seen as the first step towards domestic policy being Europeanised through the other patterns of governance mentioned above, as it necessarily involves an “uploading” process whereby, for the most part, national policies of member states are synthesised into a European policy; elements of national policy are “uploaded” to the European level.

Europeanisation so described looks like the process of European integration; indeed, Bulmer and Radaelli spend little time analysing this aspect of Europeanisation for precisely that reason, preferring to include it “for the sake of completeness.” (Bulmer and Radaelli, 2004: 5).

Nevertheless, this does highlight the relationship between European integration and Europeanisation; attempting to differentiate between the two is not without difficulties (Howell, 2004: 8). For example, when Olsen (2002: 2) suggests that Europeanisation is ‘a political project aiming at a unified and political stronger Europe,’ or ‘the development of institutions of governance at the European level,’ one could argue that he is talking about the process of European integration rather than the process of Europeanisation, although there is no reason why integration should imply political union as an end-state (Buller and Gamble, 2002: 17). However, Howell (2004: 9) does point up some differences. He suggests that the creation of European level institutions is the outcome of European integration, and the development of these institutions incorporated Europeanisation, both down-loading and up-loading. Howell suggests that Europeanisation can be understood from either a “bottom-up” (up-loading) or a “top-down” (down-loading) perspective, and European integration ‘comprises the environment on which Europeanisation impacts or which it emanates.’ However, Howell points out that “interaction between the two areas merg[e] into one another for different lengths of time” (Howell 2004: 9).

Both Radaelli (2004: 11-12) and Buller and Gamble (2004: 20) examine the ‘goodness of fit’ version of Europeanisation put forward by Börzel and Risse (elsewhere (Sturm & Dieringer 2005: 283) described as the ‘misfit hypothesis’). This might be seen as more a

mechanism of Europeanisation, and is the idea that the greater the incongruence between domestic policy and EU policy, the greater the adaptational pressure will be for domestic policy to “fit” with EU policy. If there is no difference between EU and domestic policy, then domestic policy will face no adaptational pressure.

The criticism that Radaelli and Buller and Gamble level at this hypothesis, in essence, is the way that this idea is presented, which is as the only way in which Europeanisation can work. Radaelli (2004: 12) argues that it is just one way in which Europeanisation “works”; in fact, Bulmer and Radaelli (2004) posit the goodness-of-fit” argument as a ‘default interpretation’ of the mechanism of Europeanisation for types of policy that fall into the positive integration category (Bulmer & Radaelli 2004: 16; also Radaelli 2004: 18).

Other criticisms have to do with the assumptions that the hypothesis makes: for example, that the EU challenge to domestic politics is static, rather than one that is itself the subject of negotiations. In other cases (particular accession countries), an EU rule might not challenge an existing domestic counterpart as none exists to challenge: the EU rule is then passed on as an innovation. Furthermore, the EU is sometimes blamed for unpopular changes that national governments themselves wish to make; Europeanisation pressures are in these cases invented (Sturm & Dieringer 2005: 283).

The other mechanisms of Europeanisation include *regulatory competition* and *policy learning*.

Policy learning, for Bulmer and Radaelli, ‘is an important dimension in all stages of Europeanisation,’ and so becomes all the more important in those areas where the EU does legislate, but offers a forum for the exchange of policy ideas. OMC as we saw above, was instigated in 2000 and is just such a forum that the EU primarily uses ‘as a means of spreading best practice and achieving convergence towards the EU goals,’ a forum for the transfer of policy learning rather than a formal legal mechanism, and in some cases beyond policy areas that the EU has competence, thus potentially opening up new areas to Europeanisation (Bulmer and Radaelli 2004: 11). There are nine broad policy areas that have been identified (Radaelli, 2003: 32-33): broad economic policy guidelines, European economic strategy, social inclusion, pensions, innovation, education,

information society, environmental policy, health care and (by ‘open co-ordination in disguise’) direct taxation, and in these areas, governments agree criteria for best practise and a “peer review” of their policies: this generates, Bulmer and Radaelli argue, their own vocabulary and belief systems, as well (Bulmer & Radaelli, 2004: 11).

Regulatory competition on the other hand expresses the idea that there is a competition between member states regarding regulatory rules – so, for example, there might be a “race” for highly skilled labour, which might involve removing regulations to attract these workers. However, Bulmer and Radaelli argue that the evidence for this type of Europeanisation – always horizontal – is ‘pretty mixed,’ although there has been little work on this area. Moreover, one of the few studies, in the telecommunications market, found that no such competition took place between member states (Bulmer & Radaelli, 2004: 10-11).

So far, then, we have seen that Europeanisation might be defined in more than one way. But there seem to be two problems – it is either described as a process, albeit a process that has not been fully explained, or sometimes it is described in a way that is difficult to distinguish from European integration. We can perhaps agree with Howell that there appear to be conceptual differences, but that the boundaries between them are blurred with the ‘dialogic and dialectical process between the two’ (Howell 2004: 9).

3.2 Europeanisation as a ‘situation’

To obviate the problem of labelling Europeanisation as a process, but not being able to say exactly what that process is, there has been a move to define Europeanisation as a *situation* where Europeanisation has occurred. Buller and Gamble give their definition as: ‘A *situation* where distinct modes of European governance have transformed aspects of domestic politics’ (Buller & Gamble, 2002: 26; my emphasis). This is similar to an earlier definition which can be found in John (2002: 881). Summarising a number of perspectives, John from specifically a local level point of view states that Europeanisation as the impact of the EU includes the transfer of ‘ideas and working practices that can transform politics at the local level away from nationalised and hierarchical forms of politics’.

It is also effectively as ‘situation’ that Ian Bache and Adam Marshall (2004: 5-6) define Europeanisation when they say that it is ‘the redirection or reshaping of politics in the domestic arena in ways that reflect the policies, practices or preferences of EU level actors/institutions’, a definition that gives direction to the one offered by John above.

They go further, however, and distinguish between *direct Europeanisation* and *indirect Europeanisation*, which is the difference between an intended impact of a given EU policy, unopposed by domestic actors, and an unintended impact, again unopposed by domestic actors. Bache and Marshall also distinguish between *voluntary Europeanisation* and *involuntary Europeanisation*, which is the difference between EU policy being imposed in the face of opposition by domestic actors in the intended area, and “spill-over” of EU policy into other areas that is opposed by domestic actors. There are further distinctions between *voluntary-direct* and *involuntary-indirect Europeanisation* on the one hand, and *coercive-direct Europeanisation* and *coercive indirect Europeanisation* on the other (see table 1).

In common with Bache and Marshall, Burch and Gomez treat Europeanisation as a “situation,” or the general effects of the EU, in whatever form. The Burch and Gomez approach, however, has the advantage of concentrating on the emerging regional tier, and then testing a particular conception of Europeanisation. Bache and Marshall, on the other hand, have tested Europeanisation by policy area – and have picked regional policy. As Kohler-Koch (2002: 1) has pointed out this is a well-researched area of EU policy, and precisely because it is EU policy, one is not that surprised that we find Europeanisation.

Burch and Gomez (2004) define Europeanisation as:

‘[t]he study of the ways in which and the extent to which EU political, social and economic dynamics interact with [and shape] the patterns of discourse and identities and the nature of politics, institutions and public policies at supra-national (EU), national and sub-national levels’ (Burch & Gomez 2004: 1).

They then examine how Europeanisation has impacted ‘various institutional dimensions and components of the polity’ (Burch & Gomez 2004: 3). They further identify five components of a polity: electoral; civil society representatives (includes political parties, Non-Governmental Organisations, elite networks, and so on); political executive and the civil service, but they concentrate mostly on institutions (Burch & Gomez 2004: 3). Employing the ideas of Europeanisation that Radaelli had earlier developed (Radaelli (2000)) to determine the *extent* of Europeanisation (inertia, absorption, transformation and retrenchment), they found this to be wanting as it did not cover all of the extent of the changes that they identified (Burch & Gomez 2004: 4, 20).

It might be argued that a legitimate question is to ask what has actually brought the change about, however. Understanding *how* something has been “Europeanised” tells us nothing about what Europeanisation actually is – there seems to be a danger of saying that it is a process, which brings us back to the criticisms levelled by Buller and Gamble mentioned above. Nevertheless, it is this approach to Europeanisation that has been used with respect to EU regional policy in England, to which we now turn our attention.

	Voluntary	Coercive
Direct	Intended impact; unopposed by domestic actors	Intended impact; opposed by domestic actors
Indirect	Unintended impact; unopposed by domestic actors	“Spill-over” of coercive-direct Europeanisation in one area to another

Table 1 Taken from Bache and Marshal (2004: 6)

3.2 Europeanisation and the English Regions

One of the questions relating to EU regional policy and Europeanisation is: did European regional policy cause devolution of power within member states to the regional level? (See for example, Kohler-Koch 2002: 1). As it will be shown below, Burch and Gomez (2004) in particular argued that Europeanisation, flowing from EU regional policy, was critical to the development of regionalisation within England.

3.2.1 Sub-National Authorities and the ‘Europe of the Regions’

Bache and Marshall (2004) concluded that Europeanisation was the outcome of subnational authorities (SNAs) engaging with EU regional policy. This raises the question of the role of subnational authorities within the integration process, and thus a possible source of Europeanisation.

Although the concept itself dates from the 1970s (Bullman 1996: 4), the phrase “Europe of the Regions” became increasingly used during the 1990s. Regional governments of Member States began to organise conferences on the theme, and scholars became interested in the question of whether regional governments were becoming more influential in the EU legislative process. Indeed, the phrase was in danger of becoming ‘overworked’ (Jeffery 1997: 57).

In essence, a “Europe of the Regions” in Anderson’s (1990) view, is one where ‘subnational actors [...] shift their dependency from the national to the supranational level’ (Anderson 1990: 423) in terms of resources, and potentially increase the possibility of them pursuing ‘autonomous policy objectives’. In this way, the interests of regions, which may have been ‘stifled by national governments’ will ‘flourish’ (Anderson 1990: 419). The EU thus ‘becomes a source of empowerment for subnational groups’ (Anderson 1990: 423). Thus the phrase “Europe of the Regions” more often than not expresses the implicit idea that ‘SNAs have become able to reach “beyond the nation

state” [...] and secure unmediated access to EU decision-making processes” (Jeffrey 2000: 2).

An apparent sign of this emerging “Europe of the Regions” was a rise in the number of offices established by the SNAs in Brussels. This was partly in order for them to deal directly with the Commission rather than be controlled by national governments – it has been noted that there is at the European level within the policy-making process a lengthy agenda-setting stage, but that the process rewards ‘expertise and networks within Brussels’ (John 2000: 878). The number of offices that SNAs were establishing in Brussels was being driven to a large extent by those countries with a strong regional tier of government, in particular the German Länder (Nugent 2005: 264), and it was reinforced by the general acceptance of the principle of subsidiarity within the EU, which again potentially bypasses national governments (Sturm & Dieringer 2005: 281). In part, SNA engagement with the EU policy process was a response to the increase of EU competencies that resulted from the 1986 Single European Act: new legislation that was aimed at the completion of the Single Market affected local and regional governments as it had to do with areas such as planning, transport, vocational and professional training, tourism, the environment, health and safety and even to a certain extent social services and housing (John 1996 134-35; John 2000: 879).

Attention to the changing role of subnational authorities within the EU during the 1980s and 1990s has focussed on structural funding and the increasing role of subnational authorities in the management of these funds (for example, Marks (1992); Bache (1999); see also Roller (2001: 6)); EU funding is seen as one of the main preoccupations of the “regions”. This is not surprising as ‘any public authority becomes alert if it can access pots of money’ (John 2000: 879).

The Commission had encouraged SNAs to become involved in the management of structural funds through the partnership principle which it introduced into the process with the reforms that were initiated in 1988. Partly as result of this, the increasing importance of a “regional” view within the EU policy process was recognised institutionally with the setting up of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) under the terms of the 1991 Treaty on European Union (the Maastricht Treaty). The Treaty of Nice (2001) clarified that membership of the CoR was restricted to *elected* officials, either at

local or at regional level (Nugent 2005: 265-66). Interestingly, prior to the enlargements of 2004 and 2007, most of the 266 members of the Committee, were from local, and not regional, government (McCormick 2002: 97).

It was the number of offices by SNAs at Brussels, and their activity, that has attracted not a little scholarly attention. For example, Marks *et al* in 1996 noted that three-sevenths of the then EU population was represented at Brussels by offices of ‘fifty-four regional and local governments’ (Marks *et al.*, 1996: 40). For Marks, this represented ‘a new and unheralded form of *regional mobilization* in the European Union’ (Marks *et al.*, 1996: 40; my emphasis), and ‘they provide Commission and Parliament with *regional viewpoints* on all issues that concern them’ (Marks *et al.*, 1996: 40; my emphasis). In 1988, there were – Marks *et al* reports – just fifteen such offices.

It is worth pointing out here the way in which Marks *et al* has elided the word ‘local’ in with the word ‘regional’ with respect to the governments being represented directly in Brussels – this is a typical feature, and it is a point to which we shall have recourse to return with respect to England. The important – if rather elementary – point is that within the English context, what is often meant is “local”, and not “regional”, as we now understand the word to mean. The word “regions” generally within the European discourse has perhaps become shorthand for what more accurately may be described as “sub-national”.

It is perhaps equally noteworthy that Marks *et al*’s ‘governments’ in fact covers, not just more than one level, but governments that also take different forms, and have different constitutional powers, over differing numbers of population and size of areas within their respective Member States, lest one understands the word to refer to equal institutional units – something that Marks *et al* does at least implicitly concede in his analysis of the reasons for the expansion in the number of “regional” offices (Marks *et al.*, 1996: 45-49).

As Marks argues elsewhere, regions are in the process of mobilisation in order to “*share responsibility*” (Marks 1996: 417, emphasis in original) with national and supranational authorities.

Hence, the rise of “regions” within the EU did not just threaten the national governments of Member States monopoly in the EU decision-making process, but also potentially undermined the “gatekeeping” role a Member State’s national government may have had. The traditional view of a “two level game”, whereby, at the domestic level, regional governments (and other domestic groups) lobbied national governments to adopt particular policies, and at the international level, national governments attempted to satisfy the various demands of domestic actors, was now seen as possibly about to be replaced. The scenario increasingly envisaged was one where SNAs would be at the same international table as national governments with the Commission, and may even be at a completely new table with the Commission and without national governments (Anderson 1990: 418-419).

On the other hand, for Tömmel (1998: 75), the emerging “Europe of the Regions” was not the beginning of the ‘elimination of the nation-state’, but still nevertheless signalled ‘a fundamental change’, one that will ‘affect all government levels’ with ‘more autonomously acting lower-level tiers’.

The increasing role of local and regional governments within the European integration process represented something of a problem for traditional (that is, state-centric) theories of European integration that proposed models within the context of a “two-level game”.

It is within this context that one of the key analytical responses, Multi-Level Governance (MLG), was put forward in an attempt to better understand the ‘mobilization of domestic actors’. This approach (that is, not a *theory* as such) sees the EU as ‘a single, multi-level polity’ (Marks *et al.*, 1996: 41); theorists have also examined the role of policy networks within multi-level governance: indeed, ‘multi-level governance covers all stages of the policy process and lies at the heart of policy networks’ (Rhodes, Bache & George 1996: 375). Loughlin notes that: ‘MLG analysis mushroomed in the 1990s... a whole industry around MLG developed in PhD theses and academic work’ (Loughlin 2007: 385).

Crucially, this approach assumes that the State is not a unitary actor, but that the national executive is just one among other state actors, and that the state may well pursue more than one, sometimes incompatible, goal. Moreover, it assumes that at

different stages of the policy process, the state may not necessarily be the most powerful actor, and the ‘influence of actors at different levels of government varies widely across, and even within, policy arenas’ (Marks 1996: 418).

It has been argued that, for the European Commission, networks form part of the way it manages multi-level governance (Rhodes, Bache & George 1996: 377; see also Hooghe & Marks 2003: 234). For Marks (and Hooghe) it is not so much a “Europe of the Regions” but rather a ‘Europe *with* the Regions’ (Hooghe, quoted Marks *et al.*, 1996: 61) which better expresses the idea of regional governments wishing to take their place alongside national governments; this is in contrast to the idea that regions were somehow intent on sidelining national state executives from decision-making.

One of the more interesting aspects of MLG is the premise that ‘authoritative competencies’ (Marks 1997: 22) from the central state are both diffused downwards to the subnational level as well as upwards to the supranational level. This bringing together of apparently separate phenomena at different levels – European integration and regionalisation – has been a feature of the MLG approach in particular (Marks 1997: 21). In the view of Marks, this diffusion of power from the national level upwards to the European and downwards to the sub-national is *irreversible* as well as inevitable (see John 2000: 882; Roller 2001: 8).

MLG highlights the role of policy networks that encompasses actors from different ‘levels’ of governance (Marks *et al.*, 1996: 41), and it is here where the “regional” offices may be seen to come into play as, on the face of it, this would appear to be an obvious manifestation of MLG at work. In his survey of the “regional” offices in Brussels, Marks *et al* (1996: 56-57) found that the offices did not appear to be opened in order to gain a greater leverage for structural funding in particular; there was not, in other words, evidence of “resource pull”. This point is critical, because the resources available to subnational authorities from the EU consist for the most part of structural funds.

The hopes or fears, depending on one’s point of view, that a greater role for the SNAs within the EU policy process would diminish the role of the national executive within a Member State as a “gatekeeper” appear to be unfounded, even if the “gatekeeping” role appears not to be the one delineated by Anderson (1990). Anderson had suggested that

national governments play a gatekeeping role between ‘indigenous interests and the Brussels bureaucracy’ (Anderson 1990: 442), and that this role had not been fundamentally altered by the 1988 reforms to structural funding arrangements; if anything, in the case of Britain, subnational actors were ‘bound [...] ever closer to state officials’ (Anderson 1990: 443).

Bache has hypothesised the national state as an ‘extended gatekeeper’ (Bache 1999) or a ‘flexible gatekeeper’ (Bache 1998). The essential point is that, although there has been greater *participation* by sub-national authorities, effective power remains with national governments. The example that Bache (1999: 35-37) takes is that of the partnership principle that was the outcome of the 1988 structural funding reforms. This was the principle that had been cited by Marks (1993) in particular as a strong example of emerging multi-level governance within the EU. However, Bache, looking at policy implementation and outcomes, shows that while there was indeed mobilisation of sub-national actors, including SNAs, in the case of the UK, they were not able to substantially alter the EU programmes: ‘central government exercised greatest authority where it mattered most’ and that while there is ‘much evidence of multi-level *participation* [...] the extent to which it constitutes multi-level governance is unclear’ (Bache 1999: 37, 42; emphasis in original). In this way, central government intervenes at different points of the policy process to stop the emergence of a genuine multi-level governance system – hence ‘flexible gatekeeper’ (Bache 1998: 155).

Martin and Pearce (1999), in their survey of UK local authorities, found that:

‘contrary to theories of multi-level governance [...] very few local authorities expect, or even aspire, to help “set the agenda” for EU policy debates’ (Martin & Pearce 1999: 47)

They conclude that the partnership principle did offer local authorities ‘enhanced access to policy debates or influence over policy formulation’ (Pearce & Martin 1999: 47).

John (1997) makes a similar point about participation as Bache, but from the point of view of Commission officials; he points out that Commission officials on monitoring committees were *observers* of policy rather than *shapers* of policy, and argues that

Marks has therefore made too much of the 1988 structural fund reforms: '[b]ecause of the financial and legal power of central government, programmes are as centrally run as before' (John 1997: 138).

This might be seen as a slightly unjust criticism of Marks. Marks does concede that the State may at times in the decision-making process act as a "gatekeeper" and cites the case of the UK in particular, along with France, Italy, Spain, Ireland and Greece (Marks 1996: 402, 404-05).

The point here, perhaps, is that the UK is seen as an exception within the context of cohesion policy – Marks has clearly alluded to it, and others, for example, Bache (1999), have clearly elaborated on this.

It will be seen that there is a relationship between MLG on the one hand and Europeanisation on the other. In particular, MLG posits sub-national mobilisation as a direct result of the European integration process – a form of Europeanisation in other words. This mobilisation itself creates the phenomena which MLG seeks to describe, with its policy networks and cross-level interaction (see fig 5).

As Featherstone (2004: 8) points out, the 'large number of studies' that relate "Europeanisation" to the 'strengthening of subnational governance' is consistent with the view that the EU is encouraging the emergence of multi-level governance – although he cites John (1997) as the only UK-based evidence (see below).

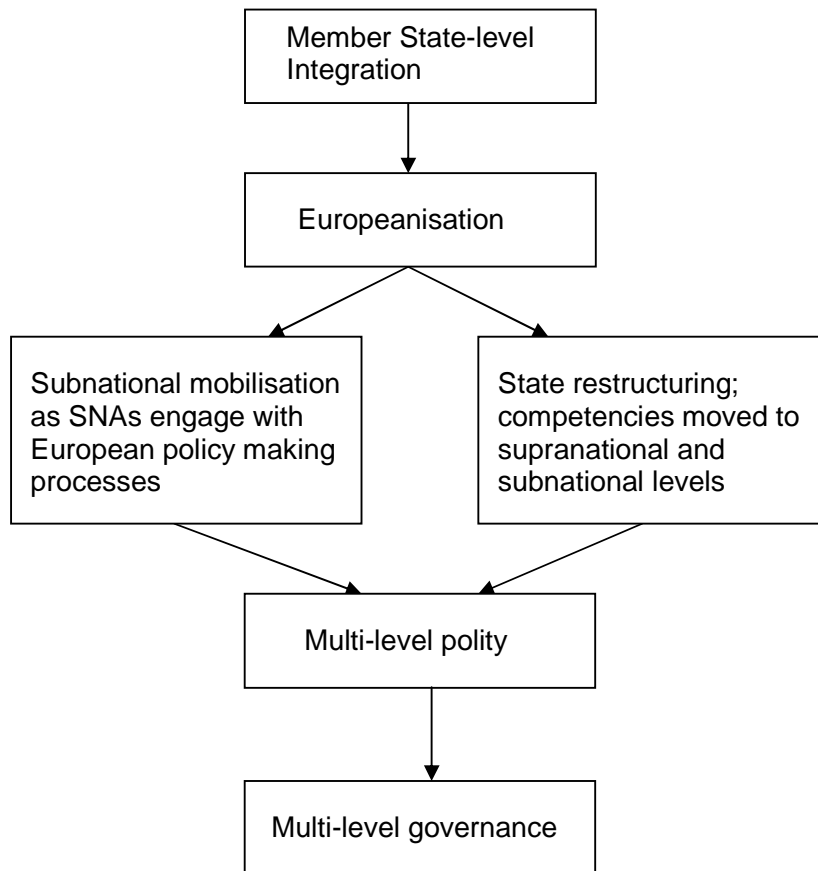


Fig 5 Flow chart showing one way of viewing the relationship of Europeanisation with multi-level governance through the framework of multi-level governance. It should be noted that subnational mobilisation may result from other causes.

The link between MLG and Europeanisation has been employed in the case of Italy by Giuliani (2003). He argued that the ‘multi-level governance framework’ can be used in ‘interpreting Europeanization processes’ (Giulini 2003: 618). Furthermore:

‘The development of a gatekeeping role for state actors [...] illustrates such challenges within a specific domestic dimension of Europeanization...’ (Giulini 2003: 619)

Europeanisation, on this reading, is reflected more in the changing of the activity of governance, rather than a formal transfer of power among levels of government. It might be questioned as to whether one can see the gatekeeping role of state actors as something that is compatible with MLG (we noted above Bache's distinction between participation and governance); nevertheless, we may agree that the gatekeeping role is one which state actors have had to adopt as an outcome of Europeanisation, whether it fits into the MLG framework or not.

John (1997) also implied a direct relationship between Europeanisation and MLG, this time in the case of the UK. He saw the growth of MLG as an inevitable result of Europeanisation: given that Europeanisation for him involved (among other things) 'networking with other European local authorities and experts, [and] direct lobbying of Brussels institutions' (John 1996: 133), the connection was almost inevitable, because 'MLG is about relationships between the levels of government and the coalitions which form both across and within parts of the national state' (John 1997: 139).

The key point in this relationship for our purposes is the *assumption* that the MLG framework makes regarding sub-national mobilisation – the assumption that the European integration process which gives rise to MLG has been a key, if not the key, factor in the mobilising of SNAs. One of the outcomes of this mobilisation is – according to MLG – increased participation within the European policy-making process. Both increased mobilisation and an increased role for SNAs in European policy-making have also been seen as the effects of Europeanisation, as we shall see below. Indeed, in John (1996), it appears that one way of assessing the extent to which SNAs have been 'Europeanised' is simply to find the extent to which MLG has occurred.

The importance of the EU to the process of regionalisation is underlined in Tömmel (1998). Although acknowledging the role of 'functional or economic "necessities"' and responses to 'the challenges of globalization', it was 'in particular the European Commission and its evolving modes of decision-making and policy implementation' that prompted regions to take 'a more active role and performance in European as well as national decision-making and policy implementation' (Tömmel 1998: 53).

These views of Europeanisation, and its influence on regionalisation, represent an essentially top-down, European-level perspective, however. A view of the nature of Europeanisation has been arrived at by examining the European level, and it is from that perspective that the phenomenon of regionalisation has in turn been examined (as we shall see in more detail below). Arguably, this perspective is a narrow one, and one that may overlook other, perhaps more important, factors. The question for us, then, from a bottom-up, regional, point of view, is ultimately to find the extent to which Europeanisation may be said to have been a key factor in English “regional mobilisation”.

3.2.2 Structural Funds, Europeanisation and the English regions

We saw above that structural funds and the involvement of the regions within the EU policy process attracted scholarly interest. Importantly, it was noted that regional policy generally and structural funds in particular have been the principal focus for the theoretical groundwork for MLG, although not without criticism. We shall see how structural funds and EU regional policy have also been important to those studying the effects of Europeanisation on the English regions. In other countries (for example, Spain), structural funding in particular has been associated by some authors with the growth of regionalisation (see Smith (1998)).

Apart from significant increases in financial resources, the reforms agreed in 1988 meant that the European Commission moved away from “project assistance” towards “programme assistance” in the form of Integrated Development Programmes. Crucially, however, the partnership principle was introduced, which strove towards a triangular relationship between the Commission, national governments and regional authorities. Together, they would now draw up a Community Support Framework (CSF), which would act as an over-arching framework for integrated programmes. (The Community Support Frameworks became known as the Single Programming Documents (SPDs) after 1993) (John 1996: 138).

For the funding period 2000-2006, structural funds, the main instrument of EU regional policy, referred to the following EU funds: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); the European Social Fund (ESF); the Guidance section of the European

Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund (EAGGF); the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG) and the Cohesion Fund. The latter Cohesion Fund was specifically for Member States with a per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of less than ninety per cent of the EU average (which effectively meant Spain, Greece, Portugal and Ireland); the UK was allocated over £10 billion⁵ from the other funds in the period 2000-2006 (McCormick 2002: 125).

Crucially, however, structural funds have been seen as an important “Europeanising” influence within the context of regionalisation within England and the emergence of English regions (Burch & Gomez 2003: 19). This should not surprise us. Indeed, because of the sums of money involved, it has been commented that ‘[w]riting on Europeanisation tends to be obsessed with the ERDF’ (John 2000: 881).

Ian Bache and Adam Marshall (2004: 7-9) used what they called a “governance approach” to study the effect of Europeanisation on domestic change. This approach combined three related notions. The first was the belief that the UK is itself an emerging multi-level polity and therefore constraints on executive power. It was also in part based upon a “core executive approach”: that is, the belief that the networks that surround the formal institutions, such as governmental departments and the Prime Minister’s Office, are as important as the institutions themselves. A third element was the policy networks model. Following Rhodes, they defined a policy network as ‘set of resource-dependent organisations’ (Bache & Marshall 2004: 8).

The strength of the “governance approach” was its sensitivity to the particular domestic context of Britain, and recognises the ‘importance of domestic institutions in mediating EU pressures, leading to adaptation with national colours.’ (Bache & Marshall 2004: 13-14). Concentrating again on regional policy, one of their findings was that if there was both administrative and political opposition to “coercive-direct Europeanisation,” then Europeanisation can be successfully resisted. The partnership principle, introduced by the European Commission into regional policy during the 1988 reforms, was resisted by a Conservative government that did not want to give trade unions any policy-making role, nor empower local government – both of which were implied by this principle. It seems that for purely pragmatic reasons, the Conservative government changed its

⁵ See the DTI web site as <http://www.dti.gov.uk/regional/european-structural-funds/page37929.html>

attitude during the mid-1990s. Also, no city or region was able to use European support against central government to go against its own regeneration agenda by retaining oversight over all structural fund negotiations and implementation (Bache & Marshall 2004: 10,13). However, there was evidence of Europeanisation. An example of “voluntary indirect” Europeanisation occurred in both Glasgow and Birmingham when competing for EU Objective 2 funding. Their city governments either (in Glasgow’s case) incorporated European personnel into the department of Development and Regeneration Services or (in Birmingham’s case) created a European and International Division. For Bache and Marshall, this is evidence that the EU’s ‘strategic and holistic approaches to regeneration’ were internalised (Bache & Marshall 2004: 12).

It is worth noting that Bache and Marshall use as examples cities (or the partnership principle) rather than English *regions*. Europeanisation, as portrayed in Bache and Marshall (2004), seems from their evidence have affected the level of local authorities, rather than regional. This is perhaps a clue to the origins of the Europeanising influence on the English regions.

Garmise (1997) also examined EU regional policy on two “regions” – South Wales and the West of England. She notes that the ‘West of England (Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire) is a distinct sub-region of the English South West region’ (Garmise 1997: 15) – in itself a revealing level of analysis given that she was examining the impact of EU regional policy on the UK’s *regional* tier; not sub-regional. Her findings indicate that, while regional networks based upon EU ‘money-hunting objectives’ (Garmise 1997: 21), these have been sub-regional in character: in other words, sub-regional, and not regional, mobilisation. The West of England was at that time unsuccessful in qualifying for EU funds; however, the evidence she reviewed from the North West suggests that problems emerged ‘in terms of distributing the fruits of regional labor’ precisely because of the sub-regional nature of the efforts. On this reading, the Government Offices are an attempt at centralisation by the government (Garmise 1997: 21). This suggests an attempt by central government to control any process of regionalism (or ‘region building’ Garmise (1997: 22)) initiated by local authorities working together. At the very least, it raises the question of which “regions”, precisely, are being mobilised by EU regional policy.

Although he was not specifically looking at regions, but rather the UK national state and the effects on local authorities, it is interesting to note that one of the effects of the Europeanisation that John (1996) seeks to describe is not the creation of a new tier of governance, but a partial change in the power relationship between national government and local government. The explanation – for John – lies not just in structural funds, but also in the fact that an increasing number of EU directives in the 1990s affected the operation of local government (John 1996: 132). Indeed, [b]ecause UK local authorities have a wider functional base than their counterparts in France, Spain and Italy, so they became leaders of professional lobbies on, for example, the government’ (John 1996: 133).

In one of the few studies that do so, Burch and Gomez (2004) look specifically at English *regions* within the context of Europeanisation. This study emphasises the “European” element within the regionalisation process, but also contains key caveats on the overall significance of the effect of Europeanisation to the regionalisation process within England. It is these caveats and qualifications that do more to support the thesis that Europeanisation has had a minimal impact on regional governance within England than the tone of the overall study seems to imply.

Essentially, Burch and Gomez argue that partnership and programming – introduced in 1988 and 1993 reforms – were key principles that had the biggest impact on the regions, as they brought together actors which then helped develop a regional focus, essentially bringing about regional players. Structural funds underpinned this development – they acted as an incentive, in that respect (Burch & Gomez 2004: 8-9, 20).

Crucially, from the 90s, the effects of Europeanisation combined with a ‘growing bottom-up regional awareness’. This was ‘the critical moment from which the new pattern of English regionalism began to emerge’ (Burch & Gomez 2004: 4).

After 1997, the role of structural funds was secondary to central government-led regional initiatives, as the New Labour government set about on a program of constitutional change. For example, Burch and Gomez note that the creation of Regional Chambers and Regional Development Agencies did not draw ‘directly on European models or requirements’ (Burch & Gomez 2004: 11), although they also assert that EU funding

during this second period had a 'significant impact on institutional configuration during this period' (Burch & Gomez 2004: 20).

Their conclusion is a considered one. In particular, they point to the problems, firstly, of isolating the Europeanising effect, as changes that may be attributable to Europeanisation can also be attributed to other factors. This raises the issue of causality and distinguishing between one cause and the other. Secondly, they point to the difficulty about deciding upon the mechanism of Europeanisation, as it is generally assumed to be a 'top-down' process. They point to their definition as capturing some of the 'bottom-up' elements, as policy initiatives, administrative practices and legislative acts can come up from below and 'spread across states and levels of government, but that may nevertheless be described as 'Europeanisation' (Burch & Gomez 2003: 21). In particular, they point to structural funds as having had a significant impact on regional governance within England.

The other criticism of an approach based on *policy* that can be made is that there is a "top-down" perspective involved, one that looks from the European level down to the regional. The risk is a loss of the wider context within which Europeanisation is happening. Looking at the emerging regional tier in England might give a context within which Europeanisation happens, and to make a judgement about its transformative effects, for example, the extent to which regionalisation is a response to, or can be attributed to, Europeanisation. It also has the advantage that OMC is better examined, according to Bulmer and Radaelli, at the local level, rather than at the level of Brussels (Bulmer & Radaelli 2004: 14).

3.3 The Emergence of English regions and EU Funding

The essential criticism of the explanation that Burch and Gomez give for the rise of regionalisation within England is that it overstates the importance of Europeanisation as a factor. In the way that the existence of EU funding had the ability to bring actors together and to think in terms of a 'region', Europeanisation was certainly *one* contributory factor that led to the reluctant establishment of Government Offices by the Conservative governments, as we saw in the last chapter; and as, indeed, Burch and

Gomez do show. As Mawson and Spencer (1997) have argued, however, the Government Offices were largely created as a region-based response by central government – a number of agencies (for example, the Highways Agency) had been created that required a degree of coordination (Mawson & Spencer 1997: 74); the administering of EU funds was just one reason among others. In particular, GOs were introduced uniformly across England, with the same functions, regardless of levels of EU funding, with one notable exception: Merseyside. Here, there was a clear link between structural funds on the one hand and a Government Office (GO) that was created in 1994. The “region” was in receipt of European Objective One funding, and this was ‘a key reason’ (Mawson & Spencer 1997: 76) for the separate Merseyside GO. For the 1994-2000 programming period for EU structural funding, Merseyside was the only area in the UK in receipt of Objective One funding (OPDM 2003: 143). Significantly, however, this particular GO was merged with North West GO in August of 1998, when Merseyside became part of the North West.

Nevertheless, the claim that ‘English regional governance was significantly driven by the Structural Funds’ (Burch & Gomez 2004: 20) in the 1991-1997 period is questionable when put into the wider context of English regionalisation detailed in the last chapter. Interestingly, elsewhere, the authors do suggest that the creation of Government Offices ‘reflected domestic forces and pressures’ (Burch & Gomez 2004: 6), conceding that it was not, after all, structural funds that were the driver behind the regional reorganisation. It is this important caveat which goes against the tone of the paper and the general argument which they make.

Burch and Gomez also readily concede that New Labour policy, and not Europeanisation, has been the primary driver of English regionalisation since 1997 (Burch & Gomez 2004: 10). This is an important point, because most of the developments that one associates with English regions in recent times have taken place *since* 1997, as was outlined in the previous chapter. Indeed, Sandford (2005: 17) simply dismisses the impact of structural funds on the development of regional governance in a sentence or two, without actually offering any reason, argument or evidence.

Another consequence of European structural funding has been suggested by Smith (1998). His examination of the impact of structural funds on Spain, France and the UK

points to not so much to the empowerment of *regional* actors so much as to the emergence of *sub-regional* actors within a region that have destabilised regions, and encouraged 'new configurations *in the heart* of every region' (Smith 1998: 59; emphasis in original). In the particular case of England, he notes this to be one of two effects. District Councils – as oppose to County Councils – were able to use structural funds in order to 'set themselves up as leaders in charge of local development' (Smith 1998: 62). This also coincided with one of the preferences of central government at the time (the early Nineties), which was for public action closer to enterprises than County level. This example follows the pattern identified by Smith (1998: 62-63) in the UK case, where local actors were able to use the EU as a source of funding that would otherwise not be available to them, and to continue public actions that would otherwise be cut back or abolished by central government. Following 'years of attacks on their legal powers' structural funding offered these local authorities a way to 're-legitimise their institutional position within the British political system' by virtue of the partnership principle, which put these local authorities into new networks of 'public, para-public and private bodies' (Smith 1998: 63).

A second effect noted by Smith has to do with the role of Government Offices. Citing the example of Devon and Cornwall, Smith points out that EU structural funding arrangements were handled by the Government Office based in Bristol which 'remains attached to the logic of centralised power' (Smith 1998: 59). This, for Smith, is an example of where state actors are 'ready to fill the breach' (Smith 1998: 64) if local actors do not take advantage of the situation. From this perspective, central government is prepared to proactively take the lead for funding opportunities available at the EU level just as much as local or regional actors are.

This is perhaps a different perspective to the one given by Burch and Gomez (2004) above, where the impression from their work points to a central government almost passively responding to the pressure of Europeanisation. Either way, the relationship between any regionalisation that a Member State may be undergoing and structural funds would appear to be anything but straightforward, on the basis of the evidence presented by Smith (1998).

3.4 The Impact of Europe on the South West and East of England

Burch and Gomez make the point that variation in the impact of Europeanisation between the regions is dependent on the level of structural funding that a particular region receives – the higher the level of EU funding, the more pronounced the Europeanisation effect is (Burch & Gomez 2003: 6, 21).

Burch and Gomez argue that:

‘the timing, scope and impact of change in English regional governance was significantly driven by the Structural Funds and thus by the European Union’ (Burch & Gomez 2004: 20)

and:

‘Europeanisation had a primary effect on institutional arrangements within the regions’ (Burch & Gomez 2004: 20)

It is not clear how much structural funding is needed for Europeanisation to take effect. But it would appear that it is clear that the more structural funding a region receives, then the greater the “Europeanising effect”.

The South West, for the funding period 2000-2006⁶, received from EU funds up to £318 million Objective One funding for Cornwall, and £133 million Objective Two funding, mostly for Devon. With Objective Three funding and a further £6 million from the EU for the Community Initiative, URBAN II, at Bristol, the South West was eligible for just over £600 million in total.

⁶ Figures from GO East: http://www.gos.gov.uk/goeast/european_funding/?a=42496 and GO South West: <http://www.gos.gov.uk/gosw/EUFunding/?a=42496>

The East of England was not eligible for Objective One funding, but was eligible to receive up to £110 million Objective Two funding for parts of Suffolk and Norfolk; £240 million Objective Three funding and a further £6.5 million for an URBAN II programme at Peterborough: at around £356 million in contributions from the EU, it amounts to a just over half of the total the South West was allocated.

There are a two points of context to be made. Firstly, the scale, or level, at which these programmes operate is rarely “regional”, whatever the role in administering the funds or putting together bids that the regional institutions may have had. The Objective One funding that the “South West” received is in fact for Cornwall (and the Scilly Isles); meanwhile, Objective Three funding is part of a *national* programme, rather than funding that is won directly from the EU by the region itself. Again, the Community Initiatives at Bristol and Peterborough are essentially *local* programmes, awarded on the basis of local issues and needs.

Secondly, the amounts involved, while not insignificant, are of course considerably smaller than the amount central government spends on a regional basis. A 2003 report on expenditure in the regions in one single financial year (2000-01) put expenditure by central government on housing, transport, education, law enforcement, education, and so on, as £22,262 million for the South West and £22,364 million for the East of England (ODPM 2003: 158). Naturally, the same point may be repeated that was made with respect to EU funding, which is that while these figures represent a regional figure, the money itself in a lot of cases will go to local authorities. Nevertheless, this places the EU funds within the wider domestic context.

There is no clue from the literature as to the level of EU structural funding that is required before “Europeanisation” may be said to be discernible, or whether there is a “critical” amount a region would need to be in receipt of before any effects become discernible. Presumably this is simply because the research and data collection in that detail is yet to be carried out. Nevertheless, purely on the basis of structural funding, the expectation from the literature must be that the South West, receiving almost twice as much in structural funding as the East of England, will have experienced a higher degree of Europeanisation.

One way to “measure” Europeanisation is by institutional adaptation. As we saw above, the argument put forward by Burch and Gomez was that the setting up of Government Offices in the mid-nineties was in part an institutional response to Europeanisation. Another example might be the setting up of offices in Brussels as SNA adapt to the pressure of Europeanisation, often as an source of information on European developments more than to take advantage of funding opportunities, as Marks (1996a) has shown.

To take the latter point first, both regions have well-established regional offices in Brussels. However, whereas the South West UK Brussels Office (SWUKBO) absorbed the Devon and Cornwall office and West of England office that existed previously, the Essex International Brussels Office still exists independently of the East of England Brussels Office (EEBO).

Both offices are described as ‘partnerships’, principally between the three main institutions of the GO, Regional Development Agency (RDA) and Regional Assembly, along with their respective local authorities (see their respective web sites at <http://www.swukbo.eu> and <http://www.east-of-england.eu>). This contrasts with Brussels offices for other regional authorities, for example those of German Länder.

One difference between these two offices is that the management for EEBO lies with the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA). This indicates something relating to the former point to do with institutional adaptation. EERA has a long established a committee (or “panel”) that looks specifically at European policy developments, and which is jointly chaired by the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), and meetings are usually attended by a representative from EEBO. As the minutes of its meetings reveal⁷, they meet three to four times a year, with alternate meetings in Brussels.

In 2004, EERA updated its European strategy, which then inspired future Action Plans. The strategy itself identified three key objectives: one, to promote the East of England’s interests within EU policy-making; two, to promote the benefits of EU membership to

⁷ Minutes can be found on EERA’s at web site: <http://www.eera.gov.uk/category.asp?cat=71>

‘regional stakeholders’; and three, to create new business opportunities for regional businesses (EERA 2004: 7). Apart from furthering the objectives of the strategy, the main aim of the panel is to keep abreast of policy developments in areas such as the environment, transport and structural funding, as well as to be proactive in fostering links with other regions. As the full title of the panel – European and International Affairs Panel – implies, its work in that respect is not restricted to the EU: taking over the work done by Essex County Council in the 90s, it is fostering links with Jiangsu province in China, as well as developing links with a region in Norway. Within the EU, approaches have been made to regions in Germany and Poland.

This Panel, exposing EERA to policy developments directly at the European level is a potential source of Europeanisation, of course. However, as will be shown in Chapter 4, the role of a Regional Assembly itself is very limited; nevertheless, the Panel’s actual impact on the wider region, as well as the deliberations of the Assembly beyond the Panel, is a subject to further research. Instead, it is enough to note for our purposes a clear *response* to the EU in particular. This is in stark contrast to the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA): the Assembly does not have any grouping that deals with European issues, that parallels the work of the East of England’s panel, despite the Objective One status of Cornwall. Instead, since 2004, a largely South West RDA-led group – the South West Cohesion Group – has led the regional response to the changes introduced in the 2007-2013 structural funding period, to which there has been some Assembly input.

This would seem to support the contention in Jeffrey (2000) that between ‘constitutionally equally endowed SNAs’ within a Member State there may be ‘intra-state differentiation’ that is ‘just as marked a phenomenon as inter-state differentiation’ (Jeffrey 2000: 13).

Jeffrey (2000) had suggested that there are four variables that may go some way to explain SNA mobilisation: the constitutional position of the SNA within the Member State; the nature of its relations with central government; entrepreneurship; and the legitimacy of its European engagement (Jeffrey 2000: 13-15). The East of England may appear to be showing the three points that for Jeffrey are critical for entrepreneurship as

a response to the European policy environment: EERA shows ‘internal administration adaptation’, ‘leadership’, and ‘strategies of coalition-building’ (Jeffrey 2000: 14).

If correct, this suggests on the face of it that the East of England should enjoy a degree of success in influencing European policy-making: further research, however, would be needed to show to what extent that is indeed the case. A factor to be considered no doubt would be that authority within an English region does not lie with one *single* institution, a regional government, but dispersed between three principle institutions, of which the Regional Assembly is one, with the others being the Government Office, Regional Development Agency, and each have their differing agendas and roles.

3.4 Conclusions

The role of structural funds has been central to studies on the effects of Europeanisation and the emergence of the EU as a multi-level polity, a polity that the “Europe of the Regions” discourse has tried to capture. The growth of the regions within in Europe has been seen to occur as a deliberate strategy by the EU, and at the expense of the nation-state within the EU polity. However, as Keating (2008: 71-72) points out, there has been a temptation to concentrate *solely* on structural funding and *assume* that the Commission has an agenda to ‘by-pass the nation-state and refashion the political geography of Europe. Structural Funds have “regional” written all over them’.

In particular, this chapter has shown that the significance of structural funds on regionalisation in the UK can be questioned.

The degree to which EERA has apparently adapted to the European policy-making environment points to a more complicated picture than perhaps otherwise suggested by the levels of structural funding. EERA is, firstly, active in the management of the East of England’s Brussels Office, and, secondly, proactive in learning of European policy developments and trying to influence the decision-making process. This contrasts with the situation in the South West, which lacks a parallel response.

Aside from the success or otherwise of these efforts, the question arises as to whether this is a *regional* response as such, and what one means by that. Regional Assemblies

are indirectly elected bodies whose members for the most part come from local authorities – the interest in European affairs may flow *upwards* to a regional level from the interest that local authorities themselves already had, rather than a completely new response at regional level to the European level. This interest in large part stems from the fact that in England it is local authorities that have to implement policy in key areas of European interest, for example, the environment and transport, as John (1997) underlines. On this reading, it is local authorities that are finding new ways to engage with Europe by taking advantage of a changing domestic situation.

As the wider discussion on Europeanisation has shown, the changing domestic situation with respect to the emergence of a regional tier in England has more to do with a domestic agenda, rather than any European angle. Of course, the first difficulty was deciding what was actually meant by “Europeanisation”. For practical purposes, it was seen that Europeanisation has been taken as a “situation” where domestic change has occurred, change that is attributed to specifically to EU membership (Bache & Marshall 2004; Burch & Gomez 2004; Gamble & Buller 2002). Nevertheless, the discussion there underlined that, with respect to England, the “region” in question often meant “local”, besides the difficulties of attributing “change” specifically to the EU rather than domestic politics.

The argument here in sum has been that English regionalisation was not a direct response to the pressures of Europeanisation, but the result of a domestic agenda. As was also shown, however, it is not the case that the EU has no effect on the emerging regional tier – at the very least, Burch and Gomez (2004) demonstrate that there was some effect on the setting up of Government Offices in particular, and I have given an example of how a Regional Assembly has also responded. In this regard, it is perhaps more accurate to say that what has been witnessed is a response by actors at an emerging level to a wider policy environment that necessarily includes a European dimension.

Having examined the European perspective on English regionalisation, however, and decided that Europeanisation and British membership of the EU is not a sufficient factor to explain the emergence of English regions, it is now for us to turn to the UK itself.

4. New Regionalism, Territorial Re-Scaling and the English Regions

The principle argument in this chapter is that the English regions have been to a greater extent ‘created’ in order to pursue national policies that, at the very least, appear to resemble New Regionalist thinking in key aspects. The New Regionalist policy discourse, as will be shown, presumes that regions exist. It is further argued, however, that, while apparently adopting the *rhetoric* of New Regionalism, the British government has not decentralised power in the way that New Regionalism suggests – not least because the regional space is in the process of being created by these policies.

Equally, the associated idea within the political economy of the regions is concerned with the concept of “regional competition” (eg Agnew 2000: 101, 103) which likewise presumes the existence of regions in order that they may compete. Again, in the case of England, it will be shown that it was necessary to invent “the region”, in order to pursue more generally policies relating to globally competitive regions.

This chapter is structured in the following way. First, it will look at theory behind New Regionalism, before going on to discuss territorial re-scaling of economic governance and ideas of “the region”. These latter ideas are introduced as they may offer the basis of an alternative explanation as to the origins of the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and the English regions in general. An overview of national innovation policy follows, before, lastly, the RDAs and their Regional Economic Strategies (RESs) themselves will be examined, both within the context of innovation policy. This will show that, although there is some regional difference, for the most part innovation policy and economic management more generally indicates that the reason power has not been decentralised lies for the most part with central government.

I concentrate on the two case studies – that of the East of England and the South West – which will be used to show the extent to which the innovation and economic agendas of the regions are overwhelmingly circumscribed by national, and not regional, targets and priorities.

The question that is to be answered then is, given the degree of New Regionalist rhetoric surrounding the RDAs, to what extent has New Regionalist thinking been adopted within the context of the English regionalisation project? It will be argued that the New Regionalist paradigm does not fit the actual English regional experience, and it will be suggested that an explanation of why economic governance has been devolved down to regional level at all in England lies in theories of economic re-scaling as a *national* response to globalisation.

4.1 New Regionalism

New Regionalism is about the re-emergence of the ‘region as a unit of economic analysis and the territorial sphere most suited to the interaction of political, social and economic processes in an era of “globalization”’ (Tomaney 2000: 471). It is characterised, as Lovering (1999: 380) has it, by the region ‘becoming the “crucible” of economic development’ and a ‘normative bias’ that puts the region as the centre of economic policy.

It has been argued that the promotion of the regional space has been brought about by the current economic trends of globalisation and the increasing importance of the market and the private sector (Tomaney 2000: 472). As Keating (1998: 73) points out, investments by trans-national companies are easily moved from state to state, and speculation on the foreign exchanges may also mean that a state has to maintain a higher interest rate than it would sometimes prefer, thus constraining a states economic policy.

In more practical terms from a regional point of view, it means improving the competitiveness of the region by identifying and strengthening clusters, as well as supporting learning, innovation and technology transfer between firms. This is because, according to New Regionalism, regions are in competition with other regions at both the

national and global level. Competition, and the competitive region, therefore forms a key element within the New Regionalist discourse (Lovering 1999: 388-390).

Modern day states are under fiscal pressures to constrain regional spending (Keating 1998: 73). The new regional approach, then, is about ‘unlocking the “wealth of the regions” through strategies that are locally-led,’ and – as suggested above – is not unique to Britain, but one that is being tried by a number of OECD and EU countries (Amin, 2003: 24).

Nevertheless, there is a political side, as Cooke notes that ‘[i]t is seldom the case that weakly developed regional administration ... is accompanied by strongly innovative performance’ (Cooke 2001: 962). This implies regional institutions, which in turn implies a sense of a particular place as constituting a “region”.

4.1.1 The Region as a Locus in Economic Development

The idea that regions are important to economic development is not new: that the region ‘might be a fundamental basis of economic and social life “after mass production”’, first emerged in the early 1980s (Storper 1997: 3). More recently, thinking on regional development has emphasised knowledge as a factor of success; and success depends on the ability to create or apply knowledge within firms that are specific to a particular region. Hence universities (discussed in a little more detail below) have a key role, not just in terms of the production of knowledge, but also, in terms of the prevailing discourse, in creating a *regional competitive advantage* (Charles & Benneworth 2004: 4). It is useful to consider exactly how the region came to occupy the place it does within economic development.

In line with their idea that the region has more akin with a process rather than something that is static, Cooke and Morgan (1998: 64) are dissatisfied with the idea that the region is “merely” a supralocal territory below the State and having certain administrative, cultural, political or economic power. Preferring something closer to their interests in ‘process,’ they allow for two other phenomena: regionalisation and regionalism. Regionalisation is defined essentially as a “top down” process, where

typically the State devolves functions, political or otherwise, down to a supralocal authority. Regionalism, on the other hand, is a bottom up, more *cultural*, process that leads to political demands. The negotiated outcome of these demands gives rise to what has been called the “microconstitutional regulation” or “constitutional order”. In turn, this dictates institutional routines, norms, and values and establish relations of trust, in which organisations, firms and individuals are embedded – trust relations which can and do differ from region to region. The ‘collective consciousness and practical action’ of a region is mediated through the microconstitutional regulation – Cooke and Morgan’s definition of *social capital* – and which determines ultimately defensive and offensive regional action (Cooke and Morgan: 1998: 64; 208).

Given that one of their main concerns was to analyse *regional* economic evolution, as well as co-operation as a mechanism of governance (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 193), we can rightly ask with Cooke and Morgan what exactly is the region, to whom or what does it refer, and what it does (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 63-65). Cooke and Morgan suggest the following: in the ‘*new* formulation the region is a process or, more accurately, a nexus of processes rather than a thing.’ [my emphasis]. They make it clear that the region is no longer a victim: it is not, as in the 1970s, “depressed”, or “distressed”, or, in the 1990s, “less favoured” or “disadvantaged”. These linear designations are the product of classical regional policy, in the view of Cooke and Morgan, and fail to capture the internal dynamics and processes *within* regions that may create change. The idea in the UK of “development areas,” on the other hand, does hint at process in the sense that it implies an “unfolding”, even if it is directionally undefined.

Cooke and Morgan suggest three reasons as to why we should think about *regional* innovation and *regional* learning, reasons that fall into three broad areas: specialisation, externalisation, and regionalisation.

Externalisation refers to the feature of firms in the late twentieth century to outsource systems, components and services, and to do less ‘in house’. This follows the Japanese practice (referred to as *keiretsu*) and Western firms have had to follow suit in order to compete. Cooke and Morgan cite the example of the German automobile industry and firms like Audi, Volkswagen and Opel. Regions that had local suppliers had an advantage, particularly in design and innovation, where tacit, rather than codified

knowledge, was 'often the most important transactional asset' (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 68-69).

Cooke and Morgan argue that specialisation and expertise can result in regions that have local suppliers, because of the "localized learning" that comes from this tacit knowledge. However, they do concede that the evidence remains 'patchy' – in particular, it seems that networked regional economies, with enterprise support, seem to attract higher levels of focussed foreign direct investment (Morgan and Cooke 1998: 69).

Specialisation, coupled with externalisation, does not necessarily have a spatial expression, however. But added to *regionalisation* – and Wales and Scotland are cited as examples – then, Cooke and Morgan argue, one can observe the 'emergence of regionally integrated supply chains in specialized industrial branches'. This is because these regions have what Cooke and Morgan refer to as a 'regional innovation system' (see below) (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 70).

Storper (1997) gives a more detailed account of how the region came to be viewed as economically important in the last twenty-five or so years from a theoretical point of view, and the following draws on this.

Piore and Sabel's 1984 attempt at a model of a regionally-based industrial system identified flexibility and specialisation as key characteristics of a new era of capitalism, and this 'flexible specialisation' separated it from post-war mass production. This in particular has been seen as an important element for the concept of "post-Fordism". Their contribution has been seen as one of four fundamental points made by them and the 'Italian School' (or flexible-specialisation school) to the study of the development of modern capitalism: points that have, in the words of Storper (1997: 5), 'remained unchallenged.' The others are that, firstly, institutional pressures and choices made at critical points of development actually dictate the movements of technologies of production and divisions of labour, rather than a foreseeable global "best practice". This means that different forms of organisation will exist in the same sector, or that development may in fact reverse, rather than necessarily follow a general trend towards integration and towards a greater scale. Secondly, and perhaps more pertinently from our point of view, is that advanced technological learning and other important forces in

modern capitalism are territorially specific and localised, and that this is connected to 'regionalized and territorially specific institutions' (Storper 1997: 6). This has an echo in a point that Cooke and Morgan (1998) made (see above). Thirdly, and equally important from our point of view, is that successful ongoing adaptation of a regional economy relies on institutional networks. Indeed, Storper notes that there is 'a new orthodoxy' in the academic business and management literatures: a 'network paradigm for organizing production systems'. Participation within these networks is as important now as mass production was thirty years ago (Storper 1997: 6-7).

The 'California school' added agglomeration to the equation – agglomeration happens in an attempt to minimise transaction costs, in particular if tacit knowledge or trust is required. The advantages of this interdependence are flexibility, specialisation and the minimisation of risk. Without geographical proximity, the costs of intensive transactions would be too great and cancel out any advantage. A key point from this school's contribution is that, unlike the Italian School, the case studies that formed the evidence base pointed to new industrial spaces that could be created, and that agglomeration was not dependent in areas with an already existing rich historical institutional context of older industries, as in the Italian case studies of the Italian school (Storper 1997: 9-14).

The region is the locus for "untraded interdependencies" – conventions, informal rules and habits that condition economic actors to behave in a particular way in times of uncertainty. The scarcity of these "assets" has been seen as a feature of contemporary capitalism, and hence leading to geographical differences in 'what is done, how it is done, and in the resulting wealth levels and growth rates of regions' (Storper 1997: 5).

The Milieu school, developed by Franco-Swiss-Italian researchers known as the *Groupement de Recherche Européen sur les Milieux Innovateurs* (GREMI), concluded that innovation was the result of regional organisations, rules and practices, with the network at the heart of this. Depending on the scholar, the milieu may refer to the network of researchers, politicians, producers and other actors within the region, or it may refer to the body from which the members of the network are drawn and which the milieu itself surrounds. The contribution of this school is not the economic logic that says why territoriality is important: in fact, the criticism levelled at this school of thought is precisely that it offers no compelling explanation as to why regions matter in modern

capitalism (Storper 1997: 17-18). Rather, the feature this school highlights another important feature: that economics is now essentially a *Schumpeterian* process (after Schumpeter; see below): a process that creates knowledge. This knowledge is derived from the context in which actors interact, which in part will be defined by territorial boundaries (Storper 1997: 18).

As Cooke and Morgan understand it, following Maillat, the Milieu is the ‘institutional infrastructure of norms’, and routine practices, within a ‘production community’ that help to unlock the ‘learning and innovation capacity’ contained within the concept of social capital, where the latter is loosely defined as covering trust, loyalty and ‘voice’ – the dialogue of protest, or criticism (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 29-30; 210). This is seen in terms of being ‘socio-cultural and political assets’ that an agglomeration can draw upon for advantage – one is left to assume here that the agglomeration is synonymous with the “production community” mentioned above, in which case this points to a clear link between a milieu on the one hand and an agglomeration on the other (Cooke and Morgan 1998: 210).

Nevertheless, it was left to evolutionary economists, and the concept of path dependency, to add the final piece to the theoretical jigsaw. The argument is that if there are a higher number of technological choices that can be made, then there is the potential for wide variation. The territory – either a nation-state or a region – may then be the location of a concentration of technological spill-over, tacit knowledge and untraded interdependencies. This may lead to advantages other than the more tangible lower costs of production and this would, the argument goes, result in territorial specialisation and differentiation between nations or regions (Storper 1997: 20). The California school and agglomeration, mentioned above, was based on the minimisation of the costs of production. Evolutionary economics ‘is about the forces that allow the parameters of cost minimization to be altered and which get in the way of optimising.’

Schumpeter’s insight was to see incremental evolutionary development interrupted only by innovations that now and again unleash a gale of ‘creative destruction’ (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 195). The work of neo-Schumpeterians has therefore focussed on ‘technological change of the endogenous variety’ – something which neoclassical

economics has tended to ignore, seeing it as something that is acquired without, and something that happens exogenously.

While Cooke and Morgan point to Schumpeter as being one of the four “grandparents” of evolutionary economics (the others being Veblens, Hayek and Marx), it is the neo-Schumpeterians that have been the more prolific and arguably have had a bigger influence in terms of a theory of innovation. However, Cooke and Morgan point out that it was the neo-Schumpeterian school that has made this contribution through their interpretation of the work of Schumpeter, rather than Schumpeter who, they claim, citing Freeman, outlined a theory of *entrepreneurship* rather than innovation (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 195-96).

4.1.2 Innovation, Clusters and Learning

New Regionalism in particular claims that the region is or should be the level, or scale, which has as its focal point innovation, learning and knowledge creation, all of which are deemed crucial for economic competitiveness (Jones 2001: 1186).

Innovation as an area of study for regional development has focussed on ‘high technology’: a research agenda from the late 1970s onwards focussed on centres of production for high technology on the assumption that there were lessons to be learned about innovation in general that would be useful for policy makers (Storper 1997: 15).

The focus within the evolutionary economics literature is on the supply side of economics, and – in terms of technological innovation in particular – this means an emphasis on institutions that are able to provide resources that are critical for learning and interaction to take place, the elements of innovation. Learning, according to Storper (1997: 107), is that which ‘allows agents to create dynamic advantages so that the force of imitation is outrun by the pace of innovation.’ These advantages, moreover, are cumulative: ‘they take lots of time to build up and quite some time to be given away or taken away.’ Learning can take place within firms, production systems, regions or nations. However, For Cooke and Morgan (1998: 68), learning is simply defined as ‘*a change in a person’s or organization’s capability or understanding*’ [emphasis in

original]. The point for them is that learning, in either the social or organisational sense, is not simply the acquisition of knowledge, or mimicking ways of doing things: learning takes place between what we know and what we see as different about a situation; in other words, when there is understanding. A successful learning system will increase understanding in particular. In this way, the success of Japan's industries, for example, was not that they merely mimicked the West, but rather understood something from the weaknesses in the West and developed new capabilities based on that understanding. Learning is important because it is a 'first step to innovation' (Cooke and Morgan 1998: 68,70).

Interaction, meanwhile, is the 'collective behavioral characteristic of such economic groupings' (Storper 1997: 107). Interaction also 'articulates the economic phenomena of specialization and coordination.' A "system of innovation" (for Storper) allows innovative collective action to take place. While the 'supply architecture' may well not be the whole story, as Storper (1997: 107-08) points out, the focus here is on the supply architecture at the regional level, as it is this which is at the brunt of New Labour policy for the English regions. This is because the region is now seen as a 'necessary element' in this supply architecture as 'untraded interdependencies' become localised (Storper 1997: 22).

As Storper has shown (1997: 108-125), the potential for innovation is defined by five factors: the kind of product; the constraints and opportunities offered by the product's qualities (that is, the actual advantage a produce can hope to gain over an average producer); the market; the profitability that technological innovation in the production process technology would bring; and, finally, the action of individuals. Part of the problem of innovation concerns the creation of particular kinds of individuals and these actors must share mutual expectations that coordinate their actions: the 'collective-action problem' (Storper 1997: 125). The supply architecture is part of an approach to resolve this collective-action problem (Storper 1997: 131) and it is here where public policy has a role.

It is to this area of public policy that Cooke and Morgan (1998) also have made an important contribution: they underline the policy implications from their analyses of the

‘factory as laboratory’ and the ‘region as a nexus of learning processes’ (Cooke and Morgan 1998: 193).

However, it is the concept of the *regional innovation system* that forms the centrepiece of an ‘associational economy’ for Cooke and Morgan. For them, a regional *learning* system may develop into a regional innovation system. Using the theory of learning posited by Piaget (see above), they say that ‘...there is a point at which a regional *learning* system can develop towards a regional *innovation* system’ [emphasis in original] (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 71), although the exact point at which this may happen is not specified.

The concept of a regional innovation system was put forward by Cooke in a 1992 paper. Critical to this idea was Rees’ extension of the notion of a product life cycle to that of the regional life cycle, emphasising the importance of regions of intensive technology to innovation, as opposed to low technology within regions – these become ‘mature technology “branch plant” regions’ (Cooke 2001: 949-50).

The regional learning system is a network of other firms and other supporting or competing organisations in the ‘transactions environment’, as well as other branches inside the host system, and therefore has market and non-market dimensions, or dimensions that are internal to the individual corporation and external to it. It is this latter dimension that is extended to the region (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 68). The regional *innovation* system will therefore include universities; research laboratories; technology transfer agencies; Chambers of Commerce; trade associations, and other regional organisations; governance organisations; vocational training organisations; venture capitalists; banks; and interaction between large and small firms. Just as important are concerted programs; research partnerships; value-adding information flow; and policy support from governance organisations (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 71).

Cooke elsewhere (2001: 961-62) says that regional innovation systems are ‘both rare and newly discovered,’ even in successful regional economies. Cooke identifies a difference between the US and Europe which, he believes, explains the ‘innovation gap’ experienced by Europe with respect to the US. In Europe, a lot of the support for such systems rests with the public sector, for example, regional government. These are, for Cooke,

uncompetitive with the private innovation systems that exist within the US. The conclusion for policy that Cooke draws is that policy should ‘stimulate the growth of strong private organizations’ which will be more pro-active because of the profit motive which does not exist in the public systems (Cooke 2001: 971).

Regional learning and innovation systems contribute towards an economy of association, which apparently are a preferable “third way” between market societies and statist hierarchically organised societies. The associational economy is concerned, not with the boundary between the state, on the one hand, and the market on the other, but one that is based on policy networks that cross these boundaries and, in this case, promote innovation and regional development. The associational economy, according to Cooke and Morgan, derives, firstly, from a “generalization” of the learning culture, which can overcome any policy mismatches between attempting to generate ‘new productive investment’ and the need to retrain the workforce with new skills (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 80, 81).

The second principle from which the associational economy is derived is from the increased *trust* that is created in the policy networks that underpin the associational economy, thereby dispensing with expensive contractual arrangements and where a ‘policy network’ is defined as an ‘informal or semi-formal organizational mechanism’ whose members are made up from the private and public sectors and who congregate around particular policies and programmes.

Thirdly, and finally, the arrangement is seen as more democratic and inclusive, and therefore more egalitarian, for the various interested parties. The fact that all will have either a direct or indirect investment in the outcome will also ensure commitment (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 80, 81).

In terms of policy networks, the regional level is seen by Cooke and Morgan as being a high enough level to offer a strategic policy overview, yet the lowest at which regular interaction can take place (Cooke & Morgan 1998: 80). Cooke and Morgan’s ideas build on the so-called ‘network paradigm’ which sees the ‘institutional and sociocultural fabric’ as helping to encourage industrial cooperation, and the coming together of both public

and private sectors in partnerships to foster knowledge transfer and business information (Jones & MacLeod 1999: 298).

In particular, the argument runs, networks that are ‘non-linear, decentralised and heterarchical’ would solve a problem identified in the mid-80s in Wales – that of building ‘cathedrals in the desert’, which is described as ‘agglomeration but not clustering’, and also where sub-contracting and other spin-offs are the (desired) result (Cooke 2001: 950).

Institutional thickness has been put forward by Amin and Thrift to describe the ‘social and cultural factors’ that are seen as part of economic success for regions (Amin & Thrift 1994: 14). There are four factors that might lead to institutional thickness.

However, while institutional thickness may be a factor in economic success, the relationship between institutional thickness and economic success is problematic: institutional thickness may neither guarantee economic success, nor might it be necessary for economic success – for example, the case of the “M4 corridor” is cited by the authors as an example of an economically successful area but without the institutional thickness described (Amin & Thrift 1994: 17).

Innovation may afford a competitive advantage to the firm or the region, and the idea of the competitive region, is a key concept to New Regionalists (Lovering 1999: 388-91). Regional competitiveness has been said to be almost always ‘the starting point for New Regionalists’ (Webb & Collis 2000: 858).

Cooke and Morgan (1998: 187; 208-210) also underline the importance of building and sustaining of agglomerations, or clusters, concede these as being popular with policy makers in recent times. Michael Porter has been seen as one of the most influential scholars in New Regionalist thinking (see for example, also Bristow (2005)) and defines a “cluster” as ‘[g]eographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialised suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions’ which ‘compete but also cooperate’ (Porter 1998a: 197).

The development of a cluster, Porter argues, is linked to competition – one competitive industry helps to develop another, and once one has formed, the related industries

support one another. It maintains diversity, as well as helping to overcome inflexibility, inertia and also encourages innovation as it increases the flow of information and new approaches. All the while, of course, firms within a particular industry remain in competition with one another: a balance that, struck precisely, is more likely to produce a competitive advantage (Porter 1998b: 149-52).

It is within a region, or town, where clusters are more likely to be located – hence concentration in one area of London of auctioneers, for example (Porter 1998b: 154-55). Regional competitiveness is equated with productivity in Porter's view, and he has done much to popularise the idea of the "competitive region", to the point where it can now be said to have become hegemonic discourse. A competitive economy, on this view, is one in which a government has created the conditions to allow firms to take advantage of an economy's competitive advantage, while productivity of a region, is the sum of the productivity of its firms (see Bristow 2005: 285,287,288).

A cluster of itself does not necessarily imply a competitive advantage – it may become inward looking, and fail 'to *constantly* look for and interpret new buyer needs, new processes and technologies' (Porter 1998b: 171; my emphasis). Nevertheless, regional policy will be more effective, in Porter's view, if it identifies core industries and develops clusters. Critical 'magnets' for clusters are universities, research laboratories, and specialised infrastructure (Porter 1998b: 657).

Meanwhile, Storper's view of the competitive region differs slightly, and although it still relates to firms, it is defined as the 'capability of a region to attract and keep firms, or to increase market shares in an activity, while maintaining stable or increasing standards of living' (Storper 1997: 264). Bristow (2005: 289) notes that this definition has been widely accepted by New Regionalists, as well as by the OECD and the UK Conservative governments in the 1990s.

4.1.3 Criticisms

The New Regionalist thinking is not without its critics, and some of these are presented to complete the overview of New Regionalism. In particular, attention is drawn to the assumption made by New Regionalism that there are regions that exist as a pre-given. It

is in part because of this assumption, I am arguing, that required regions in England to be “invented” or created.

Lovering (1999) has made a particularly noted attack on the idea of New Regionalism, one recently described as ‘severe’ by Keating (2008: 71). Lovering writes that: ‘it is largely a fiction’ and ‘a version of fiddling while Rome burns, although the tunes are evidently catchy’ (Lovering 1999: 380, 381). For Lovering, New Regionalism ‘is a set of stories about how *parts* of a regional economy *might* work, placed next to a set of policy ideas which *might* just be useful in *some* cases’ (Lovering 1999: 384; emphasis in original). It also confuses ‘development *in* a region with development *of* a region’ (Lovering 1999: 384; emphasis in original).

Lovering also argues that New Regionalists tend to overlook the significance of the service sector, finance capital and the public sector, which he claims could be more important in ‘shaping the past development and future prospects of many a real region’ (Lovering 1999: 386).

Keating points out that much of the observed phenomena concentrate on small areas rather than culturally or politically defined regions. This echoes a similar criticism levelled by Jones and MacLeod at the research agenda of the late 80s and early 90s that sought to chronicle the emerging post-Fordist industrial world. Their criticism was that the few empirical examples from which generalisations have been made, which ‘symbolized a difficulty in translating economic restructuring vis-à-vis a “binary history” from Fordism to flexible accumulation’ (Jones & MacLeod: 1999: 296).

In another criticism levelled at the “new regional” thinking, Jones and MacLeod (1999: 299) are fundamentally dissatisfied that there has been an adequate explanation as to *why* the region should be the locus of economic activity. Further to that, they also complain that little attention is paid to the national level. Instead, regions are presented as something that exists between the local and the global, without a more rigorous definition. Often, regions themselves are presented as a “pre-given”, rather than themselves being a contested political area (Jones & MacLeod 1999: 308; Lovering 1999: 386).

The New Regionalist emphasis on competition has also been criticised. Lovering makes the point that a *region* is not a *firm*, and thus the concept of a competitive region makes no sense – indeed, it is ‘completely uninformative’ (Lovering 1999: 389). He was perhaps inspired by Krugman (1996: 7) who made the same point with regard to nation-states, and to whom Lovering refers in a following sentence on a related point – I return specifically to Krugman’s point briefly on page 119, where the point is made that Jessop (2002: 187-88) has a different conception of “competition”. Porter, we have seen above, equates productivity with regional competitiveness. Nevertheless, the central criticism Lovering makes is that the term ‘competition’, and the idea of a competitive region, within the context of New Regionalism is used as if it were an unproblematic term, something that is easily understood (Lovering 1999: 389).

MacLeod (2001), following Krugman before him, warns of the danger of remaining focussed on *competitiveness*, including clusters and innovation. By focussing on the idea that ‘everyone’s a winner’ (or at least has the potential to be) may well also be to ‘ignore the sceptre of globalized neoliberalism’ (MacLeod 2001: 819). Indeed:

‘...much of the most influential existing research tells us little about these regions’ class, gender and ethnic politics, about the forms of alienation that might result from new labour process technologies and management-labour relations, or about just how “associative” labour conditions and union rights might be for the majority of employees’ (MacLeod 2001: 819).

A further problem that Jones (2001) identifies is the apparent lack of awareness by policymakers of the uneven development of the capitalist economy: capitalism by definition creates inequalities, including regional inequality that results from interregional competition. Dunford (1998) and Dunford and Smith (2000) for example point to how policies to increase competition between regions actually creates further inequalities between them – it does not bring about convergence.

Likewise, the concept of innovation has been criticised. Lovering makes the point that New Regionalism ‘decontextualizes innovation’ (Lovering 1999: 386) by restricting itself to a discussion about the advantages of collaboration at the regional level. Lovering also

claims that New Regionalism unduly emphasises the need for perpetual innovation, either at the firm level or at the regional level (Lovering 1999: 386-87).

As part of a more general, broader criticism of the ideas associated with regional innovation systems and learning regions, it could be pointed out that these approaches only see regional economic development in terms of innovation and learning (eg Kitigawa 2004: 837), with the suggestion that this could be unnecessarily narrow view of regional development.

It is not just that New Regionalism itself can be and has been criticised, but that New Regionalism rests on the *assumption* that regions exist as a pre-given that is the key point for our purposes. In that sense, Lovering's (1999: 390) point that New Regionalism is about policy prescription (the 'policy tail is wagging the analytical dog') as much as analysis has some validity – both New Regionalism and English regions are the *explanandum* rather than the *explanans*.

4.2 Economic and territorial re-scaling

An important alternative idea to those of New Regionalism that goes some way to answering the question as to why “regions” have grown in significance in recent years is that of economic re-scaling. Re-scaling is seen as a feature of capitalism, globalisation and neo-liberal economics.

Jones (2001: 1201, 1203) has underlined the importance of considering scale. There are two important points that Jones makes: firstly, that the considerations of scale do not assume the region to be a “given”, but as something that is contested and the outcome of struggle, in contrast to New Regionalism. As pointed out above, the region is treated within the context of the New Regionalist discourse as something that is pre-existing.

Secondly, the use of regional scale by policy makers is a way of legitimising particular policies or interventions. The institutional form of the state, on this reading, reflects the power of the national state.

Key to the debate about re-scaling has been the role of competition and “competitiveness”. This is now understood to be something that geographical places may engage in, although this idea is not without its critics, as we saw above within the context of New Regionalism. Krugman has been prominent in attacking the assumption that the economic problems facing a particular country are those of being “competitive” within the global market; that the US “competes” with Japan in the same way that Pepsi competes with Coca Cola. This is a notion that Krugman rejects as ‘flatly wrong’ (Krugman 1996: 7). He argues that the competition discourse is one that is politically expedient to use, not least because of the familiarity and simplicity of the concept (Krugman 1996: 15-18).

Although concerned with *national* economies, the arguments that Krugman advances would equally apply to regional economies or cities as well. Jessop (2002: 187-88) would not entirely dismiss out of hand the notion that nations, regions and cities can compete in the way that firms do: it is a matter of how broadly “competition” is defined. In particular, if a region follows a competition strategy aimed at attracting jobs and investment, and (importantly) has the capability of doing so, then it is clear in Jessop’s view that the region is an “entrepreneurial” actor.

Jessop makes the point that *competition* is being “re-scaled”, as well. A key feature he draws out is the way in which strategies are pursued at the regional scale where competition *within* the region is limited in order to gain a competitive advantage at a higher scale, for example, the global scale. This Jessop calls “glurbanization” – a process of the national, regional or local scale where strategies are followed to ‘build global advantage by restructuring urban spaces to enhance their international competitiveness’ (Jessop 2002: 190). It is a process that mirrors “glocalisation”, where multinational firms utilise local differences and turn these into advantages at the global level (Jessop 2002 189-190).

The academic debate about economic development during the 1990s centred on the changes to the regulation and governance of capitalism, and how policies towards economic development connected to this. Jones (2001: 1185-86) identifies two significant points to have emerged from this debate. Firstly, there is not a set of narrow economic factors, nor policies set by the central government of a state that leads to

economic success. Rather, economic development depends on an array of ‘nonstate and noneconomic factors such as subnational social, cultural, and institutional forms and supports’ (Jones 2001: 1186): this is described as an ‘institutional turn’.

Secondly, there was an understanding that the successful economic coordination and a hierarchy of spatial scales (that is, a “nested” hierarchy) are both intertwined. Whereas in the past, the nation-state was the scale at which the government of capitalism and at which the regulation of economic development was centred, this appears no longer the case. Instead, the local and, more recently, the regional scales have become more significant. There was, in short, a “*territorial turn*.” New Regionalism, delineated above, represents a way in which these two elements have been brought together and built upon (Jones 2001: 1187).

More precisely, this “territorial turn” has come about following the economic crisis of the 1970s. Brenner (1999: 434-35) argues that since the 1970s, the effect of globalisation on the national scale has been to ‘decentre’ it as a scale at which accumulation, urbanisation and state regulation takes place, in favour of supra- and sub-national scales. He follows Henri Lefebvre’s account of the state. Lefebvre posited that it was the *territorial* state that provided the stable infrastructure, not just in which capital, labour and commodities could move freely, but also (crucially) in their ability to produce the ‘spatial configurations that serve as territorially specific forces of production’ (Brenner 1999: 434).

The claim is that states play a crucial role in ‘moulding the social relations of capitalism into relatively stable geographical-organisational configurations’ associated with urbanisation and accumulation (Brenner 1999: 434). The suggestion from the work of Lefebvre, Brenner recounts, is that for each spatial fix for capital, a “scalar fix”, made up of distinctive forms of territorial organisation, is pre-supposed, one that transcends the urban scale. One of the outcomes of this conceptualisation is that it allows us to see that in times of sustained economic crisis, and as capital is restructured, the scales on which capitalism is configured are also re-organised for further capitalist growth. The point Brenner wishes to make is that prior to the 1970s, this re-configuring occurred *within* states, with the state as the ‘institutional platform’ or ‘container’ (Brenner 1999: 434, 435). The effect of globalisation, Brenner argues, is that the state is itself the object of re-

territorialisation; globalisation has ‘reconfigured the *scalar* organisation of capital’s endemic dynamic of de- and reterritorialisation’ (Brenner 1999: 436 [emphasis in original]). Or, to put it another way, ‘state territoriality is not being eroded so much as being reorganized in relation to other geographical scales’ (Agnew 2000: 106).

Given the above, Brenner offers an alternative perspective to the more traditional split between those on the one hand who see globalisation as something that is both strengthening the region and threatening state territoriality by weakening its ability to regulate the economy, and those on the other hand who take the view that the state is not fundamentally altered by the globalisation process. Brenner’s position is that there is a distinction to be made between the state’s role in *re-territorialisation* and the state’s role at the *national scale* in ‘circumscribing capital flows, economic transactions, urban hierarchies and social relations’ (Brenner 1999: 438). The state may be able to maintain territoriality, but this is not to say that its policies will be tied to the national scale. Likewise, re-scaling does not, for Brenner, imply that the state is losing territoriality as globalists are liable to argue: ‘neo-liberal globalisation is re-scaling state territoriality rather than eroding it’ (Brenner 1999: 440).

For Jessop, it is not the state that is being eroded, either, but the old Keynesian Welfare National State (KWNS). As functions of the KWNS are eroded, new state functions replace these – functions associated with the competition state, a state that is ‘pursuing Schumpeterian workfare functions’, and ‘as the frontiers of the KWNS [...] are rolled back, the boundaries of the national state are rolling forward in other respects and/or other forms of politics are becoming more significant’ (Jessop 2002: 211). Elsewhere, Jessop suggests that the national economy is no longer the object of economic governance, but that it is now the ‘knowledge-driven economy in an era of globalization’, the question is how an economic space, not necessarily a national economy, can be fitted ‘into the changing global division of labour.’ (Jessop 2000: 343). It is this, Jessop argues, that has prompted concerns for international economic competitiveness and supply-side intervention.

Loughlin (2007: 392) prefers to speak ‘not of the abolition of the nation-state nor of the end of the Welfare State but of their reconfiguration’. The point is that, whereas some have claimed that the Welfare State, or KWNS in Jessop’s jargon, has been abolished and

replaced with a neo-liberal state, Loughlin – and arguably Jessop would agree – sees the state as undergoing a process of change that has yet to reach a conclusion: neither has the Welfare State has been abolished, nor has the neo-liberal state completely replaced it.

Agnew (2000: 105) makes the critical point that a *causal* connection between the apparent ‘decline’ in the authority of the state, and the rise of the region, is rarely explicitly stated (see Brenner 1998, for example). Moreover, and in keeping within the ‘re-territorialising’ perspective, the arguments apply to ‘city-regions’ as much as ‘regions’ (for example Brenner 1998, Agnew 2000): regional space, as pointed out above, is in this view a contested level, and this includes the type of space, be it ‘region’ or ‘city-region’. As Jessop (2002: 179) points out, ‘new places are emerging, new spaces are being created, new scales of organization are being developed and new horizons of action are being imagined – in the light of new forms of (understanding) competition and competitiveness.’ This also implies that *more than one scale* is in the process of being created (see also Amin 2002: 387).

Amin points to the subtle difference between Jessop and Brenner: Jessop sees globalisation as the creation or restructuring of scale as one of social relations, while Brenner sees globalisation as ‘reorganisation or relativisation of scale’ (Amin 2002: 387).

Amin objects to this view of scale and the way that spatial change is articulated, as it assumes organisation along territorial and scalar lines: ‘reterritorialisation follows deterritorialisation, and spatial scales are relativised under globalisation’. For Amin, this leads to viewing cities, for example, as no longer merely national cities, but also as global cities; a ‘nesting of territories’ made up of ‘in-here’ relations into multiple scales of ‘out-there’ (Amin 2002: 388). This can lead to a ‘politics of place’ in which the local is seen as good, and this is pitched against the global which is seen as bad. Amin feels this arises from an ‘ontological separation of place’ from space (which is ‘out there and intrusive’) (Amin 2002: 388), and where the local is seen as distinguishable from the global.

Globalisation for Amin is about the ‘reconfiguring of the spatiality of social relations’ (Amin 2002: 389). Space is understood in a broad way that includes the emotional, discursive and affiliational, as well as the physical, natural, organisational and

institutional. By taking this wider view, Amin moves away from the view of space as something that is connected to ‘distance-based considerations’ (Amin 2002: 389).

Marston has made a similar point by claiming that social theorists within geography have tended to see scale as something different from fixed in a place, one that ‘is not necessarily preordained hierarchical framework for ordering the world – local, regional, national, global.’ (Marston 2000: 220). Rather, scale is an outcome that arises from the tensions between ‘structural forces and the practices of human agents.’ (Marston 2000: 220).

Amin views place as where different kinds of politics, local, national are juxtaposed, and it is this juxtaposition between them that is important – it is the politics *in* place rather than the politics *of* place (Amin 2002: 397). In other words, place can be at once local, regional, national and global by virtue of what happens within them, rather than necessarily defined territorially.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that, while Amin does not see globalisation in terms of a shift of power away from particular spatial scales in favour of other spatial scales, Amin is not suggesting that, in terms of regulation and governance, there is *no* restructuring politics organised on spatial scales, ‘including the rise of new forms of economic and political regionalism’ (Amin 2002: 396). Rather, his belief is that the rise of electronic communications, global networks and travel, has led to a ‘perforation of scalar and territorial forms of social organisation’, thus subverting any ‘ontology of territorial containment and scalar nesting’ (Amin 2002: 395).

An important point that Amin makes could be read as a criticism directed at New Regionalism and the discourse surrounding innovation and clusters. Clusters and innovation within the context of New Regionalism rely on proximity, yet firms can form networks nationally and internationally that can then be used to find information, strike a deal and so on through the electronic media. This leads Amin to question the value placed on the proximity on which theories of agglomeration rely – firms simply do not need face-to-face contact and local knowledge for market opportunities (Amin 2002: 394). Indeed, elsewhere, Amin (2004: 36) has pointed out that “knowledge networks”

and supply chains are not restricted to locality, and that firms take pride in their ability to break out of local markets.

Amin goes on to argue that cities and regions are not necessarily areas of economic competitiveness or knowledge formation. There are a number of systems in place that move money, people goods, and information around the world, linking regions and cities through supply chains: 'The availability of regional warehouse complexes, rapid access to transport routes, the location of major logistics companies or their distribution centres, and proximity to retail or commercial outlets which can distribute goods ordered via the Internet have become key components of location decisions.' (Amin 2002: 394). Firms have become "circulatory networks", while cities – and the case can be made for regions as well, I would suggest – have become 'circulatory sites' (Amin 2002, 394, 395). With this, Amin also captures well the fluidity of globalisation, but the charge that Amin levels at theories of rescaling is that they fail to capture these features.

Amin's point regarding proximity is a valid one. However, as will be shown below, whether or not "proximity" is necessary for innovation and the creation of clusters is literally an academic point: the innovation policy of the UK government is centred on clusters, as per New Regionalist thinking, and this is reflected in the regional strategies that are led by the RDAs.

4.3 The RDAs and the English regions

Since they were created, the RDAs have attracted the attention of scholars studying the English regions. Musson, Tickell and John (2003: 8) found that forty-four out of fifty-seven articles published between 1995 and 2003 about English regions focussed exclusively on RDAs.

Keating suggests the UK's Regional Economic Planning Boards of the 1960s demonstrate territorial and functional aspects of regions – they are a meeting point between central and local government, as well as a focus for integrating various policies from central government. Writing as he was in 1998, he tentatively identified the Government Offices in the English regions as performing this role (Keating 1998: 81). The extent to which

either of these structures, however, have provided collective representation for industry or a common agenda has been questioned (see Jones & MacLeod 1999: 300, for example). However, a few more years on, and we can see the development of this regional functional and territorial space by the New Labour government. Indeed, when Richard Caborn, New Labour's then Minister for the Regions, says that there had not been a regional dimension and that 'we're really trying to modernize how we do business', one gets a sense of an intention, at least, to break with the past (cited in Jones & MacLeod 1999: 300). Caborn, it is worth noting, was concerned more with 'economics rather than a sentimental identification with a particular part of a country' (cited in Jones & MacLeod 1999: 302).

The emphasis by New Labour on regional devolution is in contrast to the previous Keynesian orthodoxy of national planning, which held that national fiscal policy would resolve any issues to do with uneven development (Jones & MacLeod 1999: 300). Jones and MacLeod (1999: 302) suggest four general factors that go some way to account for the emergence of the English region within British politics. The first two relate to Europe – firstly, the 'diffusion of a "regional Europe"', although we are left to wonder what exactly that means; and, secondly, European Union structural funds that have necessitated Single Programme Documents and an effective regional body (see also Chapter Three).

The third fact suggested by Jones and MacLeod is that there were the movements within Wales and Scotland for greater devolution of power. English regionalism, in the north in particular, might – Jones and MacLeod suggest – be seen within this context.

Fourthly, and finally, is the coming together of two agendas within the Labour party itself – on the one hand, 'old' Labour and John Prescott, who, it has been noted, had a regional agenda since the early 1980s (see Chapter Two); and the 'third way' modernisation agenda of New Labour.

As the heart of New Labour's policy towards the English regions was the creation of the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in 1999, which also emphasised the regional *economic* concerns of New Labour (Tomaney 2002b: 723); they have also been seen as

evidence of New Regionalist thinking (Jones 2001: 1187). Indeed, New Labour has a 'New Regionalist ontology of growth and competitiveness' (Jones 2001: 1194).

It is precisely because RDAs were at the heart of a *national* policy that has meant that the success or failure of the RDAs is seen as a policy success or failure of national government – and that this perhaps explains why it was felt that the activities of the RDAs should be prescribed in the manner that they have, and why they are monitored in the way that they are (below). The point here is that, while we may agree with the argument that the emergence of the English regions in general, and the RDAs in particular, form part of a New Regionalist discourse, this has not led to a decentralisation of power from the centre. Indeed, the fact that the eight RDAs were set up at the same time by a single Act of Parliament suggests that 'the locus of power remains at the centre' (Benneworth 2001: 74). It has been pointed out that the institutional form of the state, and its institutional form, reflects state power (Jones 2001: 1203), and the RDAs are part of the institutional form of the state. The fact that the English regions *now* have come into existence reflects a new focus by central government that 'co-ordination at the regional scale holds the key to economic growth' (Webb & Collis 2000: 860).

The relationship between New Regionalist thinking on the one hand and the creation of the RDAs on the other has been explored by Webb & Collis (2000). The authors point out that there is a 'significant degree of congruity' between New Regionalist thinking and the setting up of RDAs. In particular, they note the 'ubiquitous influence of endogenous growth theory' and the emphasis by the government on knowledge, skills and enterprise 'as means towards innovation as the basis of sustained competitiveness' (Collis & Webb 2000: 860). The authors also give credit to the government for 'sensitivity' towards the "network paradigm", and recognising that competitiveness is a result of not just collocation, but also tacit knowledge, collaboration, knowledge sharing, and relations of trust (DTI White Paper, *On Competitiveness*, cited by Collis & Webb, 2000: 860).

One of the ideas behind the regionalisation project was the concern at how economic recession impacts on some regions more than others (John & Whitehead 1997: 13). When it came to power in 1997, New Labour made clear that there would be no return to the redistributive pre-Thatcher policies that attempted to foster growth in the Least Favoured Regions (LFRs) (Amin 2003: 24). Rather, the focus is now to achieve 'high

and stable levels of growth and employment' in every region, and not just the poorest, through a process of 'levelling up' (HM Treasury 2003: 1). As New Labour's manifesto of 2001 put it: '[t]he new regional economic policy must be based on boosting regional capacity of innovation, enterprise and skill development' (Labour 2001: 13).

Given that the RDAs are 'business led' (HMT 2004c: 73), and that they were set the task to create 'high and stable levels of growth and employment' in the 1999 *Regional Development Agencies' Regional Strategies*⁸, it is very clear that the RDAs were designed to promote New Labour's economic agenda. The boards of the RDAs were appointed and funded by central government (Gough 2003: 23) and from the start there was an emphasis on fostering an 'entrepreneurial spirit' within the regions. One of the three aims within the remit of the RDAs was to improve competitiveness within the regions, where the RDAs are responsible for 'taking forward at a regional scale the national government's agenda of greater global competitiveness for UK businesses', and Government Offices 'maintain strong control of the RDAs' (Blackman and Ormston 2005: 378). Other aims that the RDAs have is to coordinate regional economic development and regeneration, to enhance the development and application of skills, to promote employment, and to 'contribute' to achieving sustainable development (EEDA 2006: 12)

For Jones and MacLeod (1999: 301), the RDA's can be seen as part of the 'supply architecture' of the region as per Storper (outlined above). This concern with supply-side economics had been signalled early on by the then Economic Advisor to the Chancellor, Ed Balls, at a lecture in 1997. For him, the 'new' role of government was: 'making markets work more dynamically and encouraging investment in the broadest sense – not just in machines, but in technology and innovation, skills and infrastructure – the fuel for growth in the modern economy (Balls 1998: 116). In this way, the 'supply-side barriers to growth' were being tackled, one of three pillars of New Labour's economic policy (Balls 1998: 115).

Jones and MacLeod (1999), however, also point to a reading of the surrounding discourse that suggests 'an attempt to reconfigure the "scalar narratives" and key "spaces

⁸This could be found at <http://www.dti.gov.uk/rda/strategy> prior to July 2007.

of engagement” for selected interest groups and citizens of England’. Elsewhere, Jones and MacLeod sum up the mission of the RDAs thus:

‘Each now possesses a courageous Development Strategy fully embracing the ethos of place competitiveness inscribed in Michael Porter’s (2002) cluster analysis and the purported capacity for regional economies to prosper amid the forces of globalization and the informational revolution.’ (Jones & MacLeod 2004: 439)

This emphasis on *regional* competitiveness in particular by the RDAs, and the fact that it is a central reason behind the creation of the RDAs, has been highlighted as a prominent aspect of what has been described as a “hegemonic discourse” by public policy makers, following Porter (and others). It is a discourse that has otherwise been adopted by other European and North American countries, as well as the European Commission, since the early 1990s. And it is a discourse that is shared with New Regionalism, one that sees regions as discrete entities that are capable of learning and innovating, of developing ‘social capital’, and to achieve economic advantage under the conditions of globalisation (Bristow 2005: 285; Jones 2001: 1187, 1195). As Loughlin implies, in its emphasis on local and regional autonomy, competition and choice, this discourse is essentially a discourse of neo-liberalism (Loughlin 2007: 397).

Competition lies at the centre of New Regionalist thinking, as pointed out above (see also Lovering 1999: 388), and it is the emphasis on competition by the RDAs and in their RESs that demonstrate their New Regionalist credentials as much as their rhetoric concerning enterprise and innovation. Nevertheless, defining regional competitiveness has proven somewhat problematic for policy makers, as Bristow (2005: 290) shows.

The RDAs remain accountable to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, although they are actually funded by the Treasury. Meanwhile, the regional policy context was set by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), but, since 5 May 2006, is set by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Although in the preparation their Corporate Plans, the RDAs have to solicit the views of the Chambers, as they do their regional economic strategies, there is no

requirement for the RDAs to accept any of these views (Blackman and Ormston 2005: 376-77; DCGL web site).

This of course has raised the issue of accountability, and the work by Blackman and Ormston (2005) illustrates the wider point being made here. Their key finding, in an examination of the way in which RDAs are held to account by Regional Assemblies, was the dominance of the national state in England. Using the North East as their example, they found this be achieved through a discourse of consensus between the assembly and the RDA in order to enjoy continued legitimacy 'granted by central government to regionally based decision-making' (Blackman & Ormston 2005: 384).

A number of changes have been made to the way in which RDAs operate. For example, in 2001, a £50 million Regional Innovation Fund (RIF) was set up, amalgamating the DTI's Innovative Cluster Fund and the Competitiveness Development Fund. In 2002, Single Pot financing was introduced; the 2005/06 total for RDAs was £2 billion, an increase from the previous year by £300 million (DTI 2003: 102-03).

RDAs are monitored by standard outcomes. During the year 2005-06, it appears – by the own RDAs' own admission – that not all of the targets were based on a sufficiently strong enough evidence base. Consequently, the target outcomes set were conservative, and were subsequently easily achieved by the RDAs. Or, if a target range was specified rather than a specific target, the RDA in question exceeded the lower level target (SWRDA 2006a; EEDA 2006: 55). Targets in terms of numbers varied between regions, but the outcome 'themes' measured are: job creation; employment support; business creation; business support; the number of businesses engaging within the 'UK's knowledge base'; the ratio of public and private regeneration 'infrastructure levered'; the amount of brownfield land reclaimed/developed; the number of people who had improved their skills as a result of an RDA programme; number of adults gaining basic skills; and, finally, the number of adults in work who currently lack a level 2 NVQ but were being supported by the RDA to achieve that level of qualification (SWRDA 2006a: 41).

RDAs are only a small step towards developing Regional Innovation Systems in England envisaged by Cooke – crucially, RDAs and the other governance institutions within the

English regions do not have the level of competence for ‘controlling or influencing investments’ in ‘hard infrastructure’, such as transport and telecommunications, and ‘soft infrastructure’, such as universities, research institutes, science parks and technology transfer centres (Cooke 2001: 959).

Nevertheless, the idea that *strategies* encourage ‘participative industrial systems’ is a conclusion drawn from New Regionalist thinking (Lovering 1999: 383), and RDAs, and the principal statutory focus of the RDAs is to write Regional Economic Strategies (RESs) for their respective region. With a three year life span, the East of England and the South West have now written their second RESs.

Innovation is, as we have seen, at the centre of New Regionalist thinking (see also Lovering 1999: 386), and in their second RES, the East of England incorporated an emphasis on innovation within RES. The South West, however, decided to produce a separate innovation strategy in 2001. Collectively, the RDAs in 2002-03 spent 15% of their budget, some £240 million, on ‘science, engineering and technology-related activities’ (HMT 2004c: 143).

In his overview of RDAs, Jones (2001) finds, firstly, a serious flaw in New Labour’s version of New Regionalist thinking in that *national* economic problems lie with *regional* underperformance – and that RDAs were created on the assumption that a stronger, more coherent, regional tier ‘corresponds with an ability to secure a competitive advantage under globalisation.’ (Jones 2001: 1195). The ‘conceit’ here, Jones goes on to suggest, is that there is a ‘necessary relationship’ between the region and a dynamic economy without first examining the economic, cultural and political factors that make up a region (Jones 2001: 1195-96).

Jones (2001) goes on to suggest that a gap is emerging between the rhetoric of English regionalism and the reality, a gap stemming from the flaws in the basic philosophy. The RDAs, on this reading, are seen as ‘ensuring (British) national state power’ (Jones 2001: 1197); the New Regionalist policy in reality ‘is falling somewhat short of its rhetoric’ (Jones 2001: 1201). Moreover, ‘the nation-state is retaining its role in orchestrating governance’ and it is suggested that there is a ‘naïve reading, and analysis, of the contemporary roles played by the state in economic development’ (Jones 2001: 1202).

Bristow (2005: 299) notes that the language of regional competitiveness promotes the *reconstruction* of the state, rather than a shrinkage or expansion: this would fit theories of rescaling, such as those outlined by Brenner: RDAs might be reasonably offered as an example of the kind of institutions that Brenner has in mind when he argues that ‘qualitatively new institutions’ are being produced, along with new ‘regulatory forms’, at the sub-national level as well as the supra-national level (Brenner 1999: 439). Jones (2001) speculates on a ‘fourth-cut crisis theory,’ the theory that suggests that crisis tendencies within a state’s management of the accumulation is threatened, these tendencies are ‘displaced into *politically mediated institutional projects* (such as RDAs) to protect the state’s legitimation for managing the economy’ (Jones 2001: 1204; emphasis in the original).

The following sections will make clear the extent to which the national agenda dominates any regional strategic thinking.

4.3.1 Innovation Policy at the National Level

RESs and regional innovation strategies exist within a context of national policies, so this will be examined first.

The most significant recent White Papers that which view knowledge and innovation as important include the Department for Trade and Industry’s (DTI) 1998 *Building the Knowledge-driven Economy*, and the then Department for Education and Employment’s 2001 *Opportunity for all in a World of Change* (see, for example, Potts 2002: 988). Innovation policy, however, was overhauled following Lord Sainsbury’s Innovation Review, which ran alongside the Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration. The outcome of the Innovation Review was the publication in December 2003 of the *Innovation Report*, which outlined the government’s policies on specifically innovation as a result of various consultations. It noted that the RDAs (and the Devolved Administrations of Scotland and Wales) will ‘work in closer partnership’ to influence national policy – a national policy that will then in turn be delivered by the RDAs (DTI 2003: 98). It also said that: ‘[I]nnovation is a key feature of both the national and the regional agenda for raising productivity’ (DTI 2003: 104).

This reads as though this is something that Government has decided, rather than the regions: certainly pledges in the Report to consult with and take account of the regions suggest that, until that time at least, the 'regional voice' was not listened to as much as it could have been, implying that the government formally recognises that there is a 'regional view' to take into account. This might seem a little surprising given that New Labour had by then been in power for six years and had been proactive in promoting a regional outlook, but it might also be suggestive of a lack of depth to 'regional thinking' in Whitehall, where regions are seen as having to respond to Whitehall rather than the other way around (see for example Ayres & Pearce 2004).

According to the report (DTI 2003: 107), clusters 'play a key role in driving economic growth'. The importance of clusters had been identified by the DTI in their 1998 White Paper (*Building the Knowledge-driven Economy*), which emphasised the value of strong technological and business support to localised clusters of firms that both were in competition but also collaborated with one another (Potts 2002: 989). The task of both RDAs and national government in the 2003 Report was to 'remove the obstacles to their success'. Removing these obstacles may involve providing better transport or housing to allow businesses to grow, or it may mean 'incubators' and science parks (DTI 2003: 109). Critical to clusters, in the DTI's opinion, are networks, and RDAs are 'to promote business networking'. Helpfully, the government published research by Ecotec, a consultancy that engages in economic and social development research, as well as making available Ecotec's *A Practical Guide to Cluster Development*. This was to help further a recommendation to develop clusters in a 2002 report for the DTI by Michael Porter (DTI 2003: 109).

The *Report* also outlined proposals for the setting up of 'Regional Science and Industry Councils or similar bodies' (p15). This particular initiative amounts to the sharing of 'best practice', as such bodies, the *Report* tells us, were pioneered in the North East and North West regions. The other regions followed suit. The East of England's Science and Industry Council (SIC) is typical: launched in 2004 as a result of the *Report*, it is made up of representatives from universities, research institutes, the private sector and public agencies (EEDA website). The RDAs oversee the work of the SICs, although they offer up independent advice to the regional institutions, including the regional offices of the

Confederation of British Industry, and are primarily industry-led. The South West SIC describes its purpose as providing:

‘a “science and technology for industry” perspective to the South West RDA and other bodies on regional strategies, policies and initiatives for innovation, skills, development of the knowledge base, economic growth, sector development and enterprise’ (from <http://www.swsic.com/aboutus/purpose.shtm>).

The Government’s *Science and Innovation Framework 2004-2014* is a ten-year funding regime that itself was in part the outcome of innovation review. Whereas the earlier documents had been published by the DTI, this was – tellingly – published by the Treasury: an indication of the growth of what I have dubbed the “Treasury agenda”. Tomaney and Hetherington (2003: 68) had by then already noted that: ‘The growing dominance of the Treasury [...] was increasingly evident, *especially in relation to the activities of RDAs*’ [my emphasis].

The document makes clear that ‘[p]artnership working between regional and national bodies is key’ for effective strategies, as well as to encourage knowledge transfer and innovation (HMT 2004c: 143). Indeed, the RDAs have ‘identified three modes of partnerships between national and regional bodies to deliver Government policy in this area’ (HMT 2004c: 143). Two modes of these partnerships are clearly ‘vertical’: ‘regional delivery with national advice’ in areas such as business-university links and Research and Development (R&D) grants to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs), as well as national delivery that requires regional advice, such as the Higher Education Innovation Fund. The third mode of partnership is ‘horizontal’: inter-RDA cooperation (HMT 2004: 143).

It also noted that:

‘The RDAs have expressed strong support for the Government’s ambition for the better exploitation of national funding of research into economic advantage. All Regional Economic Strategies highlight the importance of innovation to wealth creation, and make a commitment to raising skill levels and exploiting the science base.’ (HMT 2004c: 144).

This reads as though the RDAs had independently arrived at a conclusion about innovation as a central theme of their RESs. However, innovation – and competitiveness – has long been key areas of national priority, and in reality, the “Guidance” for regions on the preparation of RESs published in the past by the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has always emphasised innovation (and clusters) (DETR 1999; see also Fuller, Bennett & Ramsden 2002: 424); innovation was included as a target set by national government as part of the Single Pot financing arrangements that came into effect in April 2002 (Allen 2002: 28-29); and the RIF was an amalgamation (as mentioned above) in 2001, of the Competitiveness Development and Innovative Cluster Funds, which were national funds that targeted national aims for innovation and competitiveness through the RESs.

University-business collaboration, and knowledge transfer in particular, was highlighted in the Lambert Review of 2003. This was reinforced by Government in the *Framework 2004 – 2014* document. Knowledge transfer is seen as an area that Government can influence, as opposed to innovation, which ‘depends largely on the knowledge, risk-taking and creative energy of individuals and the private sector’ (HMT 2004c: 75). Research Councils support a wide range of knowledge transfer activity, but key funds include the Higher Education Innovation Fund, which in its second run between 2004 and 2006 had £187 million available, going up to £110 million a year in 2007-08; and the Public Sector Research Exploitation Fund, which exploits public sector research within the NHS, Research Council Institutes, and the like, and will go up from £15 million a year up to £20 million a year by 2007-08. A UK Technology Strategy drawn up by the DTI has also been developed, and an independent technology board was created – the strategy had a budget of £150 million over three years, between 2004 and 2007. This is set to increase to £178 million for the year 2007-08. The Lambert Review suggests that RDAs should have a greater role in facilitating links between the ‘science base’ and businesses – a view that the government shares (HMT 2004c: 70-76, 79).

This industry-university-government relationship, as exemplified in the examples of the RCIs and KTP, has been labelled the ‘triple helix model’. Government now expected universities to promote innovation, and as public research funding is being cut from universities, they are themselves looking for alternative forms of funding. Moreover, the Government’s 2003 *White Paper on the Future of Higher Education* encouraged

stronger relationships between universities within a region, and between universities and the RDA (Kitagawa 2004: 836, 840-41).

Fumi Kitagawa examined the role of universities within the English regions in an attempt to establish whether or not their activities amounted to an emerging regional innovation system, of the kind outlined above. In so doing, she noted that several of the rapid building of relationships between universities and RDAs has been ‘promoted by recent government initiatives’ (Kitagawa 2004: 845) – which, highlighting as it does a central government agenda, suggests, a “central government push” rather than a “regional pull” in the creation of these relationships. Precisely because they are recent and developing relationships, however, it is too early to come to any firm conclusion about how permanent these relationships are – will they continue to exist without central government funding?

Compounding this, as Potts (2002: 996) has noted, are a number of central government programs not actually ‘spatially biased’ in any way and not part of regional policy aimed at improving economic well-being of economically weaker regions. He cites the examples of the Teaching Company Schemes (TCS), Postgraduate-Training Partnerships, the Higher Education Reach-out to Business and the Community (the successor to the Higher Education Regional Development Fund), and New Technology Institutes. The funding processes did not favour a particular region, even if, for example, the TCS offices were organised along regional lines.

Potts (2002: 998) also noted the creation of the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s (HEFCE’s) university associations within the English regions. In the South West, this is the Higher Education Regional Development Agency South West (HERDA-SW); the counterpart in the East of England is the University Association for the East of England (UAEE). These are supported financially for the most part by the RDAs, GOs, and the Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) as well as by HEFCE.

4.3.2 The Regional Mission in Higher Education

As mentioned above, universities are seen as having a particular role to play within the ‘success’ of the region – they have become, it has been wryly noted, a ‘must have’ item on

a list that includes an international airport (Charles & Benneworth 2004: 5). The UK Universities and HRFCE commissioned report – *The Regional Mission* – examined the regional impact higher education had in all nine regions, and nine separate documents were produced in each of the regions. The recently developed university associations then produced the report. Note that there is a sense in which this process reflects how regionalisation in England works – a policy or an idea at national level is decided upon (or, this case, at the ‘country’ level), which in turn is then administered or performed or otherwise enacted upon at the regional level, in all the regions. Indeed, *The Regional Mission* is essentially one large document in ten parts – nine parts produced by each of the regions, and the tenth part giving a national overview.

Further, each of the ‘regional’ parts is divided into the same ten chapters with the same chapter headings. These are: 1) Overview of the [named] Region; 2) Description and character of Higher Education in the [named] Region; 3) Contributions to the competitiveness of the regional economy; 4) Urban and rural regeneration; 5) Lifelong learning and employability; 6) The cultural agenda; 7) Social well-being and health; 8) Sustainability and the environment; 9) Contribution to regional decision-making capacity; and finally 10) The way ahead. It is presumably no coincidence that all of these areas are key areas in which the region operates, and it is noticeable, therefore, that although this is an initiative ostensibly from the Higher Education sector, the *Reports* appear to come from a “regional” view and measure university activities from that point of view, rather than to examine Higher Education Institution (HEI) activity from purely the sector’s point of view.

Moreover, the ‘primary aim of the project’ was for HEIs to map their ‘current regional engagement’. (HERDA-SW 2001: 5). This suggests that a decision was made at HEFCE to the effect that ‘the region’ was a new area with which to engage.

This idea finds support on HEFCE’s web site, where it states that ‘[w]e believe there are significant opportunities for us to work with regional stakeholders to support institutions in making the most effective contribution to their region or area, helping them to meet the needs of that region’s students, economy and civil society.’ (www.hefce.ac.uk/regions). This is further developed in *The Regional Mission*. It noted – in the Forward common to all nine of the individual reports, underlining the idea of a

greater whole to which the regional perspectives belong – that the regional in Higher Education had become more relevant as the Government has pursued its regional agenda. In particular, it noted the creation of government regional offices and the development agencies. The ‘growth of a regional mission in higher education’ had been further reinforced, moreover, by ‘new funds for regionally oriented outreach activities, and the regional focus of the 2001 white paper on enterprise skills and innovation’ (HERDA-SW 2001: 5). This ‘renaissance of the regional and civic mission of higher education’ had happened against the back drop of a greater awareness within civil society of ‘regionalism and regional awareness’, as well as a renewed focus on ‘innovation, knowledge and culture’ (HERDA-SW 2001: 5).

The East of England highlights its ‘regional innovation system’, pointing out that this largely exists because of the Cambridge area (the so-called “Cambridge phenomenon”). One quarter of the UK’s business research and development (R&D) is carried out within the East. Also important to the region’s high profile in R&D would seem to be London, as the report points out that an “arc”, from Essex through Hertfordshire to Bedfordshire, of ‘significant R&D activities’ that are attributable to a concentration of technology and research within northern London (UAEE 2001: 23).

In terms of the “regional innovation system” itself, the report highlights a growing ‘knowledge cluster’, citing the role of private sector innovation and technology consultancies, as well as finance providers (banks and venture capital firms). EEDA receives a mention for technology support through its framework set out within its regional innovation and technology strategy (UAEE 2001: 23). However, most of the description of the “regional innovation system” details the success of individual universities or companies engaged in technology or engineering in particular. This means there is no sense of what the “regional innovation system” actually is. And while the emphasis is on the “regional” aspect, it is not clear in what way belonging to ‘the region’ helped, or exactly how the “benefits” of particular successes would be distributed. The establishment of Microsoft at Cambridge, for example, was said to bring ‘much greater regional benefits’ as it is an example of a ‘high profile organisation’ taking advantage of the proximity to research based departments. (UAEE 2001: 23). Yet it is unclear exactly what, outside of Cambridge, these benefits are: how, for example, will this benefit the farm workers living in Southminster, Essex (population 3776)?

This is something obliquely acknowledged in another part of the report that refers specifically to the ‘strong sub-regional variations’, where (for example) the ‘booming Cambridge economy’ remains ‘disconnected to the rural fringe’, which is presumably where Southminster would be located; and these areas are ‘disconnected’ because of the ‘limitations of infrastructure’ (UAEE 2001: 37). From this perspective – it might be suggested – it is enough to prompt the question: “in what sense a region?” Is in fact the East of England an amalgamation of regions? The sub-region is something to which we shall return within the context of the Regional Economic Strategies – and again, later, in the Regional Spatial Strategies in Chapter Five.

While “regional innovation *system*” does not appear in the South West’s counterpart document, the phrase ‘regional innovation strategy’ is mentioned, again just once (HERDA-SW 2001: 29), and again this is not explicitly defined. Rather, there is a lengthy description of research strengths of particular universities: the University of the West of England’s aerospace research, for example, or the University of Exeter’s mining expertise, which feeds into Cornwall’s small industry, or their polymer research, a resource available to small- and medium-sized enterprises (HERDA-SE 2001: 29), and other examples that demonstrate how the Higher Education sector is contributing to businesses within the region, or other national government agendas, for example, concerning social inclusion or citizenship through their information and communication technology resources for local communities that include ‘the exploration and implementation of schemes that access information and communications technology sources as part of the government’s social inclusion and citizenship agendas’ (HERDA-SW 2001: 37).

A clear example, in fact, of national policy being either reflected or refracted in these two documents is the ‘active citizenship’ agenda (HERDA-SW 2001: 71); it also illustrates a point of difference between the two documents, although whether a *regional* difference, it is difficult to say. One of the ‘key national policy imperatives’, we are told, is the engagement with ‘people’ through regular consultation, and all departments and agencies are instructed to find ways of incorporating the views of citizens effectively (HERDA-SW 2001: 71). It seems that HEIs have a role in this, and the University of the West of England’s Centre for Local Democracy is cited as a particular example of a

university that links other universities, acts as a consultancy to other agencies, and conducts research ‘with a strong focus on the South West’ (HERDA-SW 2001: 71).

Although not mentioned as part of an “active citizenship” agenda, the East of England’s document in their corresponding chapter makes reference to the way in which universities within the region act as consultancies and how the relationships they have with the other regional institutions are a purely technocratic exercise. (As a point of fact, the word “citizenship” occurs six times in the South West’s document and not at all in the East’s). Interestingly, however, the ‘relative novelty’ (UAEE 2001: 68) of the East of England is referred to, along with the people in the ‘new non-departmental bodies’ who are to ‘make sense of the new regional scale at which they are expected to work’ (EEAU 2001: 66).

A way of looking at the slight differences mentioned is as a difference of interpretation – a difference which might in turn be interpreted either as a regional difference, or just as a difference of interpretation between the people engaged in researching and writing these documents. As pointed out above, the main chapter title appears to have been given, and it seems that the task was simply to write to the chapter title from the perspective of the region and, I would suggest, as to how that title is understood.

Although arguably comparatively minor documents within the regional policy documentation overall, its heavily prescribed nature is perhaps indicative of the extent to which the English ‘region’ has been invented and is now part of a changed landscape with which HEIs have to deal. A similar minor example given in a later chapter regarding the web sites of the Government Offices illustrates the same point and is equally indicative (see p170). The East of England’s *Regional Mission* says candidly that ‘the region [the East] itself, a recent political invention rather than one with deep historical or cultural affinity, is in a state of formation.’ (UAEE 2001: 69). The contrived nature of English regionalisation could not be underlined more forcefully.

4.4 Regional Economic Strategies

As Jones (2001: 1199) claims, the Regional Economic Strategies (RESs) are ‘the single and most important task facing the RDAs’. The first RESs were signed off in 1999, and are revised on a three yearly basis. Of the two under consideration, the South West’s RES has had the most recent revision – they are revised every three years – saw a wide number of consultations take place over a twelve week period. There were, however, five assumptions which were made by the board of the RDA. The first of these was that the core ‘drivers and objectives were right’ (SWRDA 2006c: 4). That the final draft of the RES claimed that the review process ‘claimed broad support for keeping the core of the strategy – the vision, drivers and strategic objectives – unchanged’ (SWRDA 2006b: 20) was a happy coincidence, as the suggestion from the assumptions made prior to the review must be that if the review process found a radical change from the last RES was needed, this would not have happened.

Another assumption made concerned the clarity of roles as to who was delivering and how: ‘the activities and actions need to be updated and also clarified – especially who is delivering, how and in what capacity’ (SWRDA 2006c: 4), suggesting perhaps that this was not so clear in the past.

With regard to the process itself initially, 2000 organisations were notified by letter of the upcoming review and consultation process in 2005 (SWRDA 2006c: 4), although of those, around 400 or so appear to have responded positively and were acknowledged as having a degree of input into the final draft (SWRDA 2006b: 3). This compares with the 276 that contributed in way or another to the East of England’s RES (EEDA 2004: 131).

Thematic meetings were held in order that SWRDA could engage directly with ‘partners’, as were one-to-one meetings with organisations and invitations to comment in writing – in all there were some 55 meetings and 154 written responses. Four sub-regional events, attracting more than 400 people, were held during which the by then draft RES was consulted upon. This formal consultation period was done in conjunction with the

consultations on the Regional Assembly's draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) in order to encourage comments (SWRDA 2006b: 5).

This process mirrored the earlier process in the East of England, which also took the form of "pre-consultation" exercises, and – following the production of a draft RES – a formal written consultation and over 90 meetings (EEDA 2004: 124).

In terms of content, they follow a pattern established from the first RESs in 1999, and that was commented upon by Benneworth (2001: 47), namely that there are some differences of emphasis, but only within a nationally imposed advice for the writing of the RESs.

For example, the East of England's Regional Development Agency (EEDA) has twelve named areas in which it focuses investment, four of which form four "core products". The Four "core products", or areas in which EEDA intervene, have been identified and these are: Business Support; Investing in Communities; Enterprise Hubs; and Regional Renaissance. These four "products" exist to progress the goals and priorities delineated within the RES, although they are 'supported and complemented' by other activities (EEDA 2006: 12-13).

SWRDA on the other hand does not have four key areas that have been identified in the manner of EEDA. It has, instead, identified ten "themes", which are more or less similar to the twelve areas overall that EEDA has named. Nevertheless, the themes, as well as the outcomes, are centrally derived, highlighting the extent to which there is central control.

Central government policy sets the immediate context within which the RESs are written. The South West's "RES context" document, published alongside the RES proper, lists 32 national policy documents, strategies and White Papers that all to a greater or lesser extent have influenced the RES. On top of this are the Public Sector Agreements (PSAs), covering eight areas: Regional Economic Performance; Sustainable Development; Sustainable Communities; Neighbourhood Renewal; Enterprise; Skills; Employment; Productivity/Rural Productivity; International Trade and Foreign Direct Investment; Science and Innovation; Sustainable Food and Farming (SWRDA 2006b:

23, 31, 34). Many of the measurements devised in order to monitor progress 'reflect the Government's Public Sector Agreements' although some were 'developed with key partners' (SWRDA 2006b: 18). One of the PSAs agreed in 2002 set out indicators for the 'five drivers of productivity' (enterprise, investment, innovation, competition and skills), as well as employment and productivity itself, which serve as a way of monitoring regional performance for the DCLG, DTI and Treasury⁹.

The format of the RESs is again broadly similar, with sections that cover the Vision, the context, the strategy and delivery. The Visions for both documents talk about increasing not just the economic growth of their respective regions, but also the participation within their regional economies, as well as taking advantage of each of their 'natural, competitive advantages' (South West) or 'distinctive opportunities' (East of England) (SWRDA 2006b: 14; EEDA 2004: 9). The East of England's 'distinctive opportunities' turn out to be not that distinctive, after all: for the most part it is its proximity to London, which by its own admission it shares with the South East (EEDA 2004: 10). The South West's 'small but growing' digital media industry 'plays on the natural advantages' (SWRDA 2006b: 29) of the South West, something that is also apparently available to be used in the development of renewable energy technologies, although it is not clear what exactly these 'natural advantages' are (SWRDA 2006b: 29). The key point must be that both regions have what amounts to a 'selling point' that can be labelled as not just distinctive, but also as something that lends itself to some sort of advantage economically, even if it is not that distinctive or even clear what it is. This fits in with Porter's view of the 'competitive region', of course – that governments (in this case the UK government) create the market conditions to allow firms to exploit the competitive advantage of particular economies (in this case, regional economies) (see page 11 above).

EEDA identified eight strategic goals within their RES: growing competitiveness, productivity and entrepreneurship; a skills base that can support a 'world-class economy'; to cultivate global leadership in innovation in science, technology and research; to develop high quality places to live and work; to achieve social inclusion and 'broad participation in the regional economy'; to make the most of international 'gateways' and regional and national 'corridors'; to become a leading 'information society'; and to become an example for the efficient use of resources (EEDA 2004: 15-

⁹ The web site is at: <http://www.iggi.gov.uk/regind/default.asp>

22). Meanwhile, SWRDA has identified three 'strategic objectives': Successful and Competitive Businesses; Strong and Inclusive Communities; An Effective and Confident Region. These are supported by eleven 'regional priorities' (SWRDA 2006b: 22-35).

In terms of clusters, as per Michael Porter (see above), the RDAs in England set about mapping 'clusters' early on, which formed part of a government initiative. This was subsequently found to be inadequate by Porter himself in 2003: it 'suffered from ad-hoc cluster definitions' and failed to distinguish between 'local and "traded" industries', which ultimately meant that the 'cluster mapping effort seems to have had limited practical value.' (Porter & Ketels, 2003: 33).

The East's RES is more explicit on clusters (the word appears 68 times in the document, compared to just four times in the South West's RES), and the East's RES also talks about 'enterprise hubs'. Enterprise hubs are a 'dynamic regional network of globally-connected knowledge-based communities' and they cover 'key science, technology and knowledge-based clusters and sectors' (EEDA 2006: 20). They exist to share knowledge and best practice; to connect the region's knowledge base, as well as national and international centres of excellence; and improve access to finance. Despite successes – three major centres of innovation were completed during 2005-06 were completed – there still seemed to be uncertainty among regional stakeholders about what a enterprise hub programme is (EEDA 2006: 20).

As one may have expected, there are plenty of references to competitiveness, enterprise, innovation and entrepreneurship within the RESs: statements such as this '[w]e need to utilise untapped resources and skills, entrepreneurship, innovation and competitiveness' from the South West (SWRDA 2006b: 8) is typical in both documents in that it encourages businesses in particular to innovate: '[c]onstant innovation in products and processes [...] is essential to all service and manufacturing businesses' (EEDA 2004: 46). (It is worth recalling here Lovering's complaint against New Regionalism about the need for 'perpetual innovation' (Lovering 1999: 386-87; see also page 13.)

Nevertheless, in terms of numbers, it is not always the case that programs that deal explicitly with innovation create the more jobs. According to EEDA's annual reports and accounts 2005-06, the enterprise hubs programme cost a total of £37,656,000. The

result of this – EEDA claims – was 152 new jobs and seven new businesses created. This contrasts with the Investing in Communities programme, for example. At a total cost of £22,052,000, this has apparently created 1,425 jobs and led to 184 new businesses (EEDA 2006: 55, 89).

Overall, in total, including running costs, EEDA spent £159,484,000, which led to the creation of 4,299 jobs and 2,563 businesses. This contrasts with the South West's RDA, SWRDA. There it is claimed that a total of 6301 jobs were created or 'safeguarded', 198 new businesses were created, and the total RDA expenditure was £179,202,000 (SWRDA 2006a: 10, 41).

This is an interesting finding because of the high levels – by UK standards – of Research and Development within the East (EEDA 2004: 41). In fact, the East that sells itself as the 'ideas region' (EEDA 2004: 3) – almost literally, as it has a website and a logo dedicated to its 'brand' (www.eastofengland.uk.com), a brand that makes one think of enterprise and innovation, grounded as it is in 'the East of England's great heritage of original thinking and innovation' (www.eastofengland.uk.com web site).

Interestingly, as far as 'entrepreneurial activity' (one of the DTI's measures of 'enterprise' (DTI 2005: 3)) is concerned, the South West again outscores the East: total entrepreneurial activity increased in both regions between 2002 and 2005; but in 2005, 6.5% of the population were said to be engaged in 'entrepreneurial activity' in the East; it was 6.9% in the South West (Regional Economic Performance Indicators can be found at www.iggi.gov.uk/regind/default.asp).

4.5 Conclusion

The importance of New Regionalist concerns to the New Labour government was underlined in this chapter – concerns relating to the supply-side of economics, the focus upon regions; competition; skills; innovation; clusters. The overview of the "Regional Mission" in Higher Education illustrated, for example, the extent to which regionalisation was pursued. It also firmly indicated the way in which it was driven by national policy.

Further evidence was seen in the establishment of the RDAs and the production of the RESs. The RESs, for example, exemplify New Regionalist concerns for the promotion of clusters, innovation and the focus on high technology and engineering industries, along with an emphasis on competition. The RDAs, and the RESs, form part of a *national* strategy on innovation and enterprise.

Given the adoption of the New Regionalist discourse by policy-makers in the UK, however, there was one significant difference between the rhetoric and reality that was remarked upon. This was that the regional autonomy required of New Regionalism to allow regions to take control of their economies in the manner suggested was not part of central government's agenda. This was shown by the way in which RDA behaviour is carefully prescribed in order to fit with national policy, and also by the way in which the board members of the RDAs are chosen by the Secretary of State, rather than by, for example, the Regional Assemblies. It is more the case that national economic policy has been regionalised.

If the RDAs are not part of a response to regional demands, they may be seen as a response by the state to globalisation, as indeed the New Regionalism would imply. But as the key area in which central government has deviated from the New Regionalist thinking is reluctance to devolve power, this would appear to suggest that the state is in overall control.

The ideas of re-scaling, it is suggested, offer a clearer insight as to how the English regions have become economically significant. One of the particular strengths of this approach is that it acknowledges the role of the state – even if it is a changing role. A criticism levelled at New Regionalism has been that ‘the nation-state remains chronically undertheorized within New Regionalist discourses, especially in relation to its role as director and facilitator of the institutional forms of regional governance’ (Webb & Collis 2000: 861).

Insofar as the RDAs are concerned, at least, the regional scale is being created by the state as a response to globalisation, while the institutions the state has created offer a refocusing of state activity. The institutions do not apparently represent a weakening of

state power; merely a re-scaling. On this reading, regional institutional thickness is being established by the state in order to 'encode globalization both through political rhetoric and through globalizing accumulation strategies' (MacLeod 2001: 815).

5. Governance, Metagovernance and the ‘Hollow State’

The last chapter examined the role of the RDAs and in particular innovation policy. The argument there was that, despite the New Regionalist rhetoric of decentralisation, the activities of the RDAs are closely prescribed by central government, and their room for manoeuvre is limited. It concluded that economic governance had been re-scaled by the state, but that the dominance of central government remained unchallenged.

This chapter builds upon that argument. It looks at the growth of governance in general at the regional level and introduces the two other major institutions at the regional level, the Government Offices and the Regional Assemblies. This chapter argues that the key policies at the regional level relate to housing and planning, and that decision-making and implementation are equally constrained by central government.

I review the “hollow state” thesis, and ideas relating to governance and metagovernance. These are contrasted with the “asymmetric power model”, proposed by Marsh, *et al.* (2003), as well as some of Kooiman’s views on the nature of the state and changes in governance (Kooiman 2003).

Evidence from the English regional experience is drawn upon to argue that the asymmetric power model is a stronger explanatory tool than that of metagovernance. From the regional perspective I concur with the view that there has been ‘constitutional reform without constitutional change’ (Marsh, *et al.*, 2003: 312): the state has not decentralised power in any significant sense, but rather found alternative ways to govern from the centre.

5.1.1 The Growth of Governance

The growth of “*governance*” as seen as something distinct from *government* is something that most commentators see as dating from the 1970s; indeed, it has become ‘fashionable’ (Sorenson & Torfing 2004: 3). The word itself has a long history and more than one definition. Rhodes (1997: 47), for example, identifies six uses of governance: as the minimal state; corporate governance; new public management; ‘good governance’; a ‘socio-cybernetic system’ and as self-organising networks. Meanwhile, Richards and Smith (2002: 17-18) identify six key definitions of governance offered up by scholars since 1992 (by Rhodes, Gamble, Pierre, Pierre and Peters, Rosenau and Kooiman) as well as an additional definition that the World Bank uses (Richards & Smith 2002: 16).

The fact, however, that there is this debate at all should alert us to something that has changed in the way that government governs society, and all the definitions contain the idea that there is ‘complexity involved in the many new forms of government, as a result of the fragmentation in recent years of traditional, centralized state apparatus’ (Richards & Smith 2002: 16), or ‘to the development of governing styles in which boundaries between and within public and private sectors have become blurred.’ (Stoker 1998: 17). The concept as currently understood covers changes in the last twenty-five years that have been made, not just in Britain, but also in other countries, notably the USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Denmark, Sweden and Holland. It has been linked to globalisation, internationalisation, privatisation and the public sector reforms of the 80s and 90s (Richards & Smith 2002: 14). It has also been seen as a response to the decline in the legitimacy of policy making and implementation (Jessop 2003: 3).

Rhodes defines governance in terms of ‘self-organising, inter-organisational networks’ (Rhodes 1997: 53). He teases out four chief characteristics of governance. Firstly, he points out, there is an interdependence between organisations. This captures the idea that governance extends beyond *government*, but also includes the private sector and the voluntary sector: ‘non-state actors’ (Rhodes 1997: 53). Secondly, continual interactions between actors within networks based on the need to share resources and to work towards a specific purpose. Thirdly, interactions that follow agreed rules and rooted in trust. Fourthly, and finally, these networks are relatively independent of the state, and

are not accountable to the state, whose role is restricted to 'indirectly and imperfectly' steering such networks. They are thus 'self-organising' (Rhodes 1997: 53).

Stoker (1998: 18) has suggested five propositions that governance is about or refers to and that he puts forward for consideration. Governance:

1. Refers to institutions and actors from both inside and outside of Government
2. Recognises the blurring responsibilities and boundaries in tackling social and economic issues
3. Identifies the power dependence relationships involved between institutions
4. Is about self-governing networks
5. Recognises that government steers, or guides: it no longer uses its authority to command.

Governance is also defined as a broader concept, one that has three *modes*, however. Although slightly different terminology has been used by different authors, they more or less amount to the same idea of a triad between market, hierarchy and networks – the terms of preference for this author. Following Lowndes and Skelcher (1998: 318), who use the same terminology, the modes of governance can be analysed in the following way:

A *market* mode of governance is characterised by contractual relationships over property rights and competition between actors. Actors are independent, and only collaborate when they perceive an advantage in doing so. This is in contrast with the *hierarchical* mode of governance, by contrast, which uses authority to achieve collaboration between actors by command. The establishment of routine and bureaucratic oversight follows from this (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998: 318).

Finally, the *network* mode of governance involves actors coming together to pursue joint interests. Crucially, however, the relationships between actors within a network are based on loyalty, trust and reciprocity (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998: 318).

Rhodes (1997: 47) provides a useful illustration: the Benefits Agency, as a large bureaucracy, is typical of a hierarchical mode of governance. Market-based initiatives

include means-testing, privatisation and creating purchaser-provider splits (for example, within the National Health Service). Networks however, are increasingly relied upon to deliver welfare services, according to Rhodes.

Governance is associated with *state failure*, characterised by hierarchical (top-down) methods of governing, and defined as a failure of the state to achieve its political objectives. But, for Jessop (2002: 226), it is not merely state failure that is responsible for the growth of governance, but also *market failure*. Market failure happens when the market fails to allocate scarce resources efficiently through the pursuit of maximum profits. This Jessop puts down to the inherent contradictions within capitalism, and it is something that the market is ultimately unable to transcend.

Both state and market failure are seen by Jessop as being the basis for the growth of 'heterarchy' in the last two decades Jessop 2002: 228; 2003: 11). Characterised by 'horizontal self-organization among mutually independent actors', it involves networks and partnerships between actors and as such it represents a middle way between two other modes of governance, one based on the 'anarchy of exchange,' and the market, and the 'hierarchy of command,' based on the state (Jessop 2002: 52, 228, 229). Elsewhere, Jessop (2003: 5) refers to governance as 'reflexive self-organisation'. While reflexive self-organisation, or heterarchy, is sometimes referred to as governance, a broader concept of governance will include the other two other forms, or modes.

Governance, in particular at the local level, has been closely associated with the New Labour agenda for the modernisation of local government (Geddes 2006: 77), and it is to some extent part of the New Labour's wider "third way" approach; indeed it has been said that 'Tony Blair uses the phrase "a third way" to promote the network principle as the hallmark of the 1990s' (Lowndes & Skelcher 1998: 331).

The "third way"– it has been noted – is not so much a philosophy as either a 'value framework' (White 2001: 6) or a 'metaphor' to help forge political settlements that create an alternative to the state or the market (Richards & Smith 2001:109). It therefore sees Thatcherism, with its idea that unfettered markets guaranteeing economic success, as something that had essentially failed, and having had serious social consequences. The "third way" is an attempt at a middle ground between Thatcherism on one hand and the

Keynesian welfare state – with its basis in a hierarchical state – on the other. New Labour, in engaging with some of the social and welfare problems of family break down, and problems in health and education, would use the same mechanisms that the Conservatives had used, for example, the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), introduced by the Major Conservative government. Other mechanisms would not just use the private sector but also the voluntary sector, alongside the public sector (Richards & Smith 2002: 236-37). This also fitted into a crucial “third way” idea of society being one of “stakeholders”. Stakeholders from different groups of society – businesses, employees, public sector and the like – were to form partnerships and networks with the state; relationships based on trust. Although the language associated with this idea has tailed off somewhat after Tony Blair’s first term, it has been suggested that the idea itself still influences, not just government policy, but also departments in how they think about those affected by and involved with policy and how they can be involved in the policy making process (Richards & Smith 2002: 237).

New Labour’s “third way” and governance, then, are generally seen as an alternative to two other principle approaches: namely, correcting state failure by using more market-based solutions, or correcting market failure by extending the state (Jessop 2003: 12; Richards & Smith 2001: 110). This is an important point – Geddes underlines the point that it is often the case that commentators appear to be reluctant to strongly associate the growth of governance with political content or a specific policy, or when they do, there appears to be reluctance to associate the ‘wider shifts in political economy of which the emergence of “governance”, and the New Labour project, are both part.’ (Geddes 2006: 78).

This shows us that the concept of governance is not so much a phenomenon apparently arising from nowhere that requires explanation but rather a tool to be used for political purposes. It is embedded within the context of wider political *ideas*. And this is important because of ‘a tendency in studies of British politics not to take ideas seriously’ (Marsh *et al.*, 2003: 310). In the first place, these are the ideas associated with the paradigm of neo-liberalism, but also more broadly and more fundamentally these are ideas to do with the ‘British Political Tradition’, a tradition that – in the view of Marsh, *et al.*, 2003: 311-12) – favours a strong executive and a “top-down” view of democracy. (This is a point that will be elaborated upon below).

The growth of governance also raises the question of legitimacy. Although, as pointed out above, the growth of governance has been seen as a solution to the crisis of legitimacy within policy implementation, Stoker has also pointed out that the very act of blurring of responsibilities between the voluntary, private and public sector means that it creates uncertainty as to who is responsible when things go wrong. It seems that, while not a new phenomenon, governance structures do extend the capacity for 'blame avoiding and scapegoating' (Stoker 1998: 22).

A further problem that Jessop highlights, and one that is relevant given the brief discussion of the "third way" above, is the confusion between governance as a theoretical paradigm on the one hand, and a policy paradigm on the other (Jessop 2003: 4). This mirrors a similar problem in connection with "New Regionalism" and highlighted in the previous chapter and by Lovering (1999) in particular.

5.1.2 Metagovernance

Metagovernance is a concept that was born of 'second generation' governance research (Sorenson & Torfing 2004: 11). Whereas the 'first generation' of governance research focussed on establishing that a change from government to governance was taking place, this 'second generation' research focussed on the nature of this change. In particular, it was interested in why network governance failed or succeeded and the democratic issues surrounding governance. It was also interested in the management of governance: metagovernance (Sorenson & Torfing 2004: 11).

The idea of metagovernance – the 'organization of self-organization' (Jessop 1998: 42); the 'governing of governing' (Kooiman 2003: 170) – grew out of the recognition that there are different "orders" or types of governance.

Kooiman in particular conceptualises governance as being of different "orders". The first of these is the governing involved with day-to-day problems; governing 'as a process'. This compares with the second order of governance, which deals with the institutional setting in which governance takes place (Kooiman 2003: 153). Kooiman's view of

metagovernance demonstrates the abstract level at which discussions of metagovernance take place, because while metagovernance is not a higher level of governance, it is a higher level of abstraction. Kooiman describes the dual nature of the concept as, on one hand, the 'meta normative framework' that sets the boundaries for the 'actual governing at the first and second order', and where 'meta norms' are 'followed or neglected, tested out or changed'. On the other hand, metagovernance is also the "helicopter view" that scrutinises these norms for 'their appropriateness, their relevance, how up-to-date they are and how to-the-point' (Kooiman 2003: 183).

Jessop defines metagovernance as something that involves the 'design of institutions and generation of visions which can facilitate not only self-organization in different fields but also the relative coherence of diverse objectives' (Jessop 1998: 42). Elsewhere, and more specifically, he identifies four modes of metagovernance (2002: 240-41), and highlights a confusion in the usage of the term. Metagovernance (or metasteering) is the *collibration* [sic] between different modes of governance (the three mentioned above). To collibrate [sic] is defined by Jessop as to 'modify the relative balance' (Jessop 2002: 53). (This is a concept borrowed from cybernetics that explains how advanced systems self-adjust to pressure and tensions exerted on them (Kirkbride & Letza 2003: 464).)

The four modes of metagovernance (as an overall term) are: metaexchange; metaorganisation; metaheterarchy; and metagovernance itself. (This 'dual use' of the word 'metagovernance' here has a parallel with Kooiman's conceptualisation considered above). The first three of Jessop's 'modes' of metagovernance reflect the traditional modes of governance stated above, while the fourth 'involves rearticulating and collibrating different modes of governance' (Jessop 2002: 241; 2003: 14) and the 'judicious mixing of hierarchy, market and networks' (Jessop 2002: 242) or the 'managing the complexity, plurality, and tangled hierarchies found in prevailing modes of co-ordination' (Jessop 2003:14). It does not replace other modes of governance, but is merely concerned with managing and organising the conditions of governance.

Jessop points out that states today have an increasing role in metagovernance, and suggests a number of ways this is happening: states provide the rules and regulations by which actors pursue their aims; ensure that different governance mechanisms are compatible; are the primary organiser of policy community dialogue; have a relative

monopoly on organisational intelligence and information with which to shape expectations; act as a 'court of appeal' for any disputes arising either within or over governance; strengthen weaker forces or systems in the interests of system or social cohesion; and also assume responsibility for governance failure.

This latter point – the state taking responsibility for governance failure – contrasts with Kooiman's conceptualisation of metagovernance. The "helicopter view" of metagovernance for Kooiman is in part defined as the 'taking responsibility for governance' (Kooiman 2003: 183), yet he does not appear to be thinking of the state. Rather, it is 'the governed who take the primary role as metagovernors and the governors are the ones being governed' (Kooiman 2003: 188).

Ultimately, for Jessop, the suggestion is that the state is no longer *solely* sovereign, and that it is but one participant among others (Jessop 2002: 242-43; 1998: 43). This begs the question as to how it can reasonably be asked to take responsibility for the governance failure that Jessop believes is inevitable (see, for example, Jessop (2003), but it lends itself to the view that the state is in the process of being "hollowed out": the state becomes part of a 'pluralistic guidance system' (Jessop 1998: 43). The state would provide particular resources – public money, law – but would equally be dependent on the resources of other resources, such as knowledge or expertise, for policy success. For Jessop, the state's 'involvement would be less hierarchical, less centralized, and less *dirigiste* in character' (Jessop 1998: 43 [emphasis in original]). This is an important contrast to the "asymmetrical power model" posited by Marsh, *et al.* (2003), and discussed more fully below: briefly, their model suggests a state that, in the final analysis, retains full authority.

The difference in conclusion is an important one: on the one hand, a broad theoretical "broad brush" approach, such as one taken by Jessop, conceptualises the state as weakening in authority. On the other hand, empirical studies on the UK show that the evidence for such a weakening contests such a view or expectation.

Nevertheless, if metagovernance implies a weakening of the state, then Jessop points to a paradox, as it can also 'lead to an enhanced role for national states in controlling the interscalar transfer of these powers – suggesting a shift from sovereignty to a *primus*

inter pares role in intergovernmental relations.’ (Jessop 2002: 253 [emphasis in original]). Indeed, a central issue – it has been argued – is how governance and “self-governing networks” can be regulated through the use of metagovernance (Sorenson & Torfing, 2004: 11). It perhaps goes without saying that this paradox simply does not arise within the asymmetrical power model, given that according to this view, there is no weakening of state authority.

Stoker’s thesis of “governance by lottery” is a useful idea in the context of meta-governance. Applied in particular to the English regions, Stoker’s central idea is that devolved institutions are deliberately muddled in order that a dynamic for change and the right reforms are found, but also that there is a space for innovation. The aim is to create ‘innovation amongst the institutions of devolved governance’ with the ‘overarching goal of developing an enabling state form’ (Stoker 2002: 418). Other features of this strategy include the deliberate moving of staff from post-to-post, or random audits, with a high turnover of auditors themselves to prevent them from “going native” (Stoker 2002: 421).

The point is that, although Stoker does not use the word “metagovernance” himself, he clearly envisages design on the part of the state – New Labour has *chosen* to follow a particular strategy, and Stoker’s choice of words for the overall objective (“enabling state”) is suggestive. Elsewhere, he points out that central government cannot ‘dictate to the institutions beyond Whitehall and Westminster’, even if it retains ‘considerable influence’ (Stoker 2002: 426). This again is suggestive of the state losing sovereign authority, although retaining a significant role in governance.

Such a strategy is that networks are often said to be set up to *create* trust and personal relationships between institutions. Yet Stoker suggests that government seeks very deliberately to undermine the very networks it sets up, or allow to be set up, so as to prevent the ‘emergence of networks of potential collusion against either the wishes of management or the interests of the organization’ (Stoker 2002: 421).

5.1.3 The Regional Focus for Governance

We saw in the last chapter some of the arguments regarding the re-scaling of economic governance, and this re-scaling has an effect on other areas of governance.

Jessop (2002: 179), for example, points to the ‘relativization of scale’ as being the primary reason for the renewed focus on the region in particular. This has come about with the move away from the Keynesian Welfare National State (KWNS) that characterised the post-war period, which was seen in particular to have suffered an ‘organic crisis’ (Jessop 2002: 177). Essentially, the symptoms of this “organic crisis” are understood to be an increasing inability of the state to achieve its political and economic objectives; a loss of support for political parties and mass organisations; and ultimately a loss of belief in this particular type of national state to deliver its own promises of economic growth and general prosperity (Jessop 2002: 177). The point is that it was largely at the national level (or scale), that the economy was managed during the post-war period up until the 1980s. Since then, the national scale has lost its primacy, but no other scale has yet taken its place. Rather, the subnational scales – whether local, urban or regional – have become “sites and objects of economic and political intervention” and the global “the natural scale of economic and political organization” (Jessop 2002: 179).

Crucially, and as we also saw in the last chapter, these are not necessarily pre-given places, levels or scales: they are *new* places that are emerging, *new* spaces being created, and *new* scales of organization being developed, centred upon understandings of competition and competitiveness, in an attempt to stabilise capitalism. And competition – again as we saw previously - is increasingly seen in terms of the global space, whereas competitiveness is seen in terms of the national, regional and local space (Jessop 2002: 179-81).

With regard to the sub-national scales, Jessop notes the findings of the contents of entrepreneurial policies carried out at the urban (city) scale as being concerned with the local economy and businesses; job-creation and training; modernisation of infrastructure and assets in order to attract visitors and investment; and to create liveable cities. In some cases, policy may be aimed at simply attracting capital that

would otherwise go elsewhere by image building (Jessop 2002: 186). These findings are replicated at the regional scale in England, as will be shown below. In short, competition now no longer happens purely between firms and networks, but is now something that also happens between cities, regions and nations (Jessop 2002: 187).

Jessop has identified five areas of innovation which actors can pursue at all scales. Firstly, new types of place or space for living, working, producing, servicing, consuming, which includes integrated transport, sustainable development and gateways.

Secondly, new methods of creating location-specific advantages, perhaps through promoting agglomeration economies or new IT infrastructures.

Thirdly, the creation of new markets by 'place-marketing' areas in order to enhance the quality of life.

Fourthly, the finding of new sourcing of funding from either the central state or the EU, or re-training of the workforce, to create a competitive advantage.

Finally, the redefining of place to include, for example, the development of a global position, regional gateways, inter-regional co-operation among non-contiguous regions (Jessop 2002: 188-89).

The essential feature of an 'entrepreneurial locality' for Jessop is one that is able to 'sustain a flow of innovations' in at least one or more of these five areas (Jessop 2002: 189).

The debates surrounding multi-level governance have also been couched in terms of the re-scaling of government, characterised by sharing, both policy making and delivery capacities, as well as the transfer of authority. The overall aim on this view is that regional actors would gain a stronger sense of purpose in regional policy-making and implementation. Moreover, multi-level governance posits that, as regional actors work together, one should begin to see a reworking of the power relationships between the tiers of government (Bache & Flinders 2004; Stirling 2005; see also Ayres & Pearce 2006: 3).

Marsh, Richards and Smith (2003) concede that multi-level governance may be a useful approach, but go on to make the point that, in their view, the 'key actors in policy-making in Britain are still within, rather than outside, the core executive.' (Marsh, *et al.*, 2003: 315). For this reason, it is important not to over emphasise the move from government to governance.

5.1.4 The “Hollowing Out” Thesis

Related to the “relativization of scale” noted above, the governance question usually turns on, and is characterised by, the debate about the role of the state in the twentieth century. The view of is of a “minimum state”, and one that should act in a “steering” capacity. This view is also associated with neo-liberal politics towards the right of the political spectrum, and Rhodes has been cited as an example of a theorist who has argued for an “enabling” state that would set out the new forms of co-operation between the state and policy networks (Richards & Smith 2002: 19).

As Ayres and Pearce (2004: 256) point out, then, there are two basic readings of the regionalisation in England: on the one hand, the “hollowing out” of the state, and on the other, the growth of a “multi-level form of governance”. The issue of governance, regions, and states – hollow or otherwise – come together.

Stoker (1998: 19) appears to almost take for granted that the British state is “hollowing out”: ‘it has lost powers to the inter-governmental and local/regional level.’ This is in part because, in the third of Stoker’s five propositions of governance as a theory, Stoker views governance as something that ‘recognises the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues’ – a proposition that recognises the ‘stepping back of the state’ and the subsequent increase in responsibilities for both the private and voluntary sector, as well as the citizen (Stoker 1998: 21).

It is Rhodes, however, who is associated strongly with the “hollowed-out state” thesis. Indeed, Marsh, *et al.* (2006: 323) cite this as the most ‘radical aspect of his [Rhodes] model’. However, Rhodes notes that “hollowing out” is something that happens mostly because of the supranational level, not subnational or national. More precisely, it is not

due to “Europeanization” from the European level, but rather “globalization”. He claimed that ‘hollowing out identifies key trends’ (Rhodes 1997: 17-19). The key changes that Rhodes cite as having allowed the state to be increasingly hollowed out are privatisation and limits on state intervention; the increase in the use of agencies to deliver services; the increase in the functions of the European Union; and an emphasis on ‘managerial accountability’, limiting the discretion of civil servants (Rhodes 1997: 54).

Rhodes (1997: 100-08) goes on to elaborate on five processes, linked to changes that have taken place in the civil service since 1988 and that have contributed to the hollowing out of the state. It is perhaps important to emphasise that, for Rhodes, it is an incomplete process – the state is not yet a “hollow” state.

Institutional fragmentation is the first process that Rhodes cites. This refers to the number of bodies involved in service delivery – local government, the voluntary sector, special purpose bodies, and the private sector. The claim is that it is increasingly difficult for central government to ‘steer’ these distinct organisations, which results in a greater level of independence.

Steering itself will, Rhodes argues, also present particular problems as there is a risk that the ‘agency tail will wag the departmental dog’ (Rhodes 1997: 101) as agencies develop a particular policy expertise. Rhodes also suggests that there is the possibility of confusion of roles between the department and the agency – although he notes the frustration, from the point of view of the agencies, the ‘sponsoring departments have not adapted to the new situation’ and have a tendency to have ‘too much’ control over finance and personnel (Rhodes 1997: 101) – which would appear to undermine the “hollowing out” thesis.

Accountability has decreased, Rhodes argues, by the use of agencies and the like in policy implementation, which threatens the traditional, constitutional, ministerial responsibility, as well as adding to a general uncertainty of ‘who is accountable to whom and for what’ (Rhodes 1997: 101). This leads to a decrease in political accountability, which arises from confusion over, on the one hand, ministerial accountability for policy and a chief executive’s responsibility for management of an agency. As Rhodes points out, this distinction is in fact ambiguous at best, with chief executives being involved

with policy formulation as much as implementation. It is an arrangement which also allows for chief executives to be dismissed in the event of policy failure and for the minister to take credit in the event of success. This is compounded by Parliament, as it 'has not seized the opportunities' to improve scrutiny (Rhodes 1997: 103).

Disasters are, it is suggested, the consequences of New Public Management (NPM). The break-up of government organisations has, it is claimed, led to the creation of barriers and communication breakdowns and failures, while employment by contract has led to an increase in inexperienced staff, which has resulted in expensive mistakes (eg £20 million 'wasted' by the Wessex Regional Health Authority (Rhodes 1997: 103)) and, Rhodes claims, the relaxing of regulations leads to 'lax enforcement' (Rhodes 1997: 103).

Finally, there are the *three C's*, as Rhodes refers to the Conduct, Code of Ethics and Culture; concepts that epitomise traditional civil servant qualities, qualities which, Rhodes claims, are being undermined by 'managerialism, competition, impropriety and macho-ministers' (Rhodes 1997: 105). Nevertheless, he does warn against exaggerating the significance of managerialism and agencies on the civil service: the difference between 'the rhetoric and the reality of administration reform' (Rhodes 1997: 106).

The "hollowing out" of the state is ultimately 'another way of describing the problems of managing interorganizational networks' (Rhodes 1997: 54). The point is that, for Rhodes, these networks are self-organising; they are resistant to control from the centre and are autonomous. They therefore represent a significant movement towards 'governing without Government' (Rhodes 1997: 59) and contributes to Rhodes' view that centralisation exists alongside interdependence and fragmentation, and a 'segmented executive' characterised by 'bargaining games within and between networks' (Rhodes 1997: 4).

Countering Rhodes' argument, Ian Holliday examines Rhodes' claim that, because of the number of actors on which it relies, the centre ("core") is increasingly 'losing its grip' on policy implementation and is thus cut off, and increasingly impotent (Holliday 2000: 173-174).

Holliday (2000: 174) pointed to the lack of clear effects one way or another in the strengthening or diminishing of the role of central government from Britain's membership of the EU or the effects of globalisation. He also argues that it is difficult to go from observing a change of role and functions of the state to the conclusion that it has therefore been "hollowed out" (Holliday 2000: 174). The increased use of agencies, for Holliday, is not a threat to central government, but an opportunity to lay down guidelines and exercise greater control over implementation. Moreover, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the UK was seen as 'a highly decentralised polity', and that local government reform in the last thirty years seen in this light has not made a dramatic difference to the 'coordinating capacity of the core' (Holliday 2000: 175). In short, Holliday concludes that the evidence for any "hollowing out" affect is 'very hard to find' (Holliday 2000: 175).

Holliday also made the point that nationalised industries were 'never thought to be firmly under the control of the *central* state' [my emphasis] (Holliday 2002: 174), and thus privatisation, often seen as a clear cut case of loss of control by the central state may in fact not be after all. As Tomaney and Pike (2006: 130) have warned, the danger is seeing the growth of governance as 'natural and inevitable' rather than something that arises from decisions by national state actors.

Deas and Ward (2000: 287) have also made the point that "hollowing-out" is not so straight forward. They point out that regional institutions such as the RDAs have not only had functions passed from the national level, but have also acquired functions from local authorities. This means may lead to, not just the centre-local conflict one may expect from the "hollow-out" thesis, but also regional-local conflict.

(Marsh, *et al.*, 2003) take as their starting point a critique of Rhodes's "differentiated power model". They point out that Rhodes accepted that the centre has more legal resources, for example, than the other domestic actors, and Marsh, *et al.*, emphasise this. Following an increasingly familiar theme, they argue that the changes New Labour has made to local government have increased central control, and that changes have been brought in to improve delivery rather than democracy (Marsh, *et al.*, 2003: 316). Their analysis showed that the most powerful actors tend to be the government departments. The degree to which other actors are permitted into the policy-making process, however,

depends to a greater extent on the ideology of the government of the day. Hence, after 1979, the relationship between the Conservative governments and interest groups – particularly in social policy – deteriorated: they took the view that consultation was associated with weak government, and they were generally opposed to the concerns of these groups. After 1997, with their enthusiasm for consultation, New Labour changed this, and was more willing to consult with other actors and re-establish policy networks.

Underlying the model is what they term the “British Political Tradition” – a tradition that they view as involving a ‘limited liberal conception of representation and a conservative notion of responsibility’ (Marsh, *et al.*, 2003: 311). It is a tradition that generally does not allow referenda, for example, and it is one that emphasises ‘limited democracy and strong centralized executive power’ (Marsh, *et al.*, 2003: 312). It is this set of ideas and institutions that influence the British political system (Marsh, *et al.*, 2003: 312-13).

However, the key points for Marsh, *et al.*, are that policy networks ‘are controlled by the government and concerned with state goals’ (Marsh, *et al.*, 2003: 319) and that the state has access to resources denied to other actors; in other words, an *asymmetric* power relation exists between the British state on the one hand and the other actors in the policy network, an asymmetry which – as the name “asymmetric power model” suggests – lies at the heart of their model. So where Rhodes argues (successfully in their view) that not only has the process of governing become more complex and that the state has become dependent in some area on other actors – perhaps from either the private or the “third” sector – for service delivery and a few key resources (usually economic or professional), the result of this power asymmetry means that the state still has access to resources that no other actor has – tax raising powers, force, state bureaucracy, legitimacy, legislation – and either directly or indirectly sanctions membership of policy networks. The upshot of this is that the state might not win all its policy battles, but it wins most of them, and the state is still able to retain significant influence over what services are delivered and how they are delivered.

The view of a dominant governing executive left intact is a view shared by other commentators on New Labour’s approach to constitutional reform generally. In the words of one, there was a ‘refusal to challenge essential elements of the Westminster model’ during the first two terms of office, and New Labour ‘continues to modify the

Westminster model' rather than 'transfer power away from the executive' (Flinders, in Ludlam & Smith 2004: 137). Marsh, *et al.*, (2003: 312) echo this when they write that there has been 'constitutional reform without constitutional change'.

An important point that Kooiman makes is that hierarchical governance, while top-down in nature, is not about unilateral control (Kooiman 2003: 115). This is important, because it broadens out and clarifies what we mean by the concept: the suggestion may otherwise be of a state that actively intervenes in the manner of the Keynesian welfare state model, by command (Kooiman 2003: 120). Kooiman argues that the *nature of governance* has changed, and is changing, but that this has not affected the *nature of the state* (Kooiman 2003: 116, 130).

For Kooiman, the state still intervenes, therefore, but intervenes differently than it has done in the past. It is not, for example, that the state is now becoming or is an "enabling state", something qualitatively different from before, but that the state is now "enabling" rather than "procuring"; it is enabling others to, for example, provide welfare services, where previously it had procured such services which the state then provided itself (Kooiman 2003: 121). The state, by moving from a command to regulatory model, intervenes in a different way: 'the emphasis is less on direct, rigid and restrictive rules and intervention, than on *administrative decentralisation and regionalisation*' (Kooiman 2003: 120; my emphasis).

Some of these recent changes in governance may be unwilling changes on the part of the state, and there may be changes in the nature of governance in some areas, perhaps through privatisation or more interactive policy-making, and the state may show a "hollowing out" in some cases. This has in part been brought about because of increasing complexity and diversity of the public sector. Nevertheless, for Kooiman, 'most of the classical or primary public responsibilities still remain solidly under the umbrella of the state.' (Kooiman 2003: 130; 118).

As said above, behind the idea of metagovernance is the loss of a degree of sovereign authority by the state. Jessop has noted within the concept of metagovernance an apparent paradox between a state's sovereignty being weakened by governance and

metagovernance, yet at the same time enhancing its authority by the very act of metagovernance – setting up institutions and mechanisms, for example.

However, both the “asymmetry power model” and Kooiman suggest that no such loss of authority takes place. We can ask the question, then, to what extent does regional governance appear to represent a loss of state authority? It will be argued below that the growth of regional governance within England does not entail a reciprocal loss of state authority as the concept of metagovernance appears to imply. The developments at regional level within England are more or less as one would expect with the model proposed by Marsh, *et al.*, and supports the view of Kooiman.

MacLeod and Goodwin (1999) raise an important point with regard to the study of networks and partnerships, and the changing nature of urban and regional governance. Examining four theoretical approaches that have been used to analyse urban and regional governance (regime theory, growth coalition theory, policy networks and institutional thickness), they suggest that an important element has been overlooked: the role of the state.

MacLeod and Goodwin also argue that, because of the way in which Amin and Thrift employ their concept of “institutional thickness”, ‘[w]e never glimpse the ways in which national-level policy can ‘over-determine’ the operation of those trying to construct an appropriate institutional thickness at a local or regional level’ (MacLeod and Goodwin 1999: 514). Elsewhere (discussing regime theory), they claim that: ‘there is a failure to deal with the state as anything other than as part of regime, when often it is the state – scaled at various levels – which sets and controls the parameters for regime formation in the first place’ (MacLeod & Goodwin 1999: 508) and that ‘the extent to which the local or regional state can [...] can deviate from the national state project [...] is never really explored’ (MacLeod and Goodwin 1999: 510).

The point being made here is that too often intervention at the urban and regional scales is seen as caused by a “hollowing out” of the state or the ‘denationalization of statehood’ (MacLeod & Goodwin 1999: 515), and not by a national state project to rescale governance. The confusion is one between the ‘hollowing-out of state form and a hollowing-out of state power’ (MacLeod & Goodwin 1999: 522). This, it is suggested, is a

crucial distinction, and is reminiscent of the distinction Kooiman makes between the *nature of governance* as having changed, and continuing to change, but that this has not affected the *nature of the state* (Kooiman 2003: 116, 130).

5.1.5 Partnerships and Networks

Partnerships are a key idea within governance. They became increasingly popular as a mechanism for service delivery and policy implementation during the 1990s, although the precise definition of what a partnership actually is can be problematic. The term has been the victim of ‘overuse/abuse [...] to describe different modes of delivery’, although they have been defined simply as three or more organisations coming together around a common vision and defined goals and objectives (Knox 2002: 5).

It can be difficult to clearly articulate the precise purpose of a partnership. Knox (2002: 7) suggests a continuum that might be imagined. At one end a purely lobbying role, through to the other end, at which would be a long term partnership for service delivery. Between these two ends there are another two roles – a move along from the lobbying role is the advocacy role, where a partnership advocates a particular course of action; following that is the policy implementation role, in which a partnership is charged with implementing a particular policy by using limited funds, for example, to fund short term projects (Knox 2002: 5-8).

While there seems to be a clear link between the concepts of a policy network on the one hand and network mode of governance on the other, the relationship between a partnership and a network has been questioned. Davies (2002: 319) makes the point that a conceptual difference between governance by network and governance by partnership must be made. Views range from seeing partnerships (‘organizational manifestations’) as something distinct from networks (‘modes of social co-ordination’) (Skelcher & Lowndes 1998: 314), to the view exemplified by Stoker and Rhodes, for example, that a ‘self-governing network’ is the highest level of a partnership: as Stoker says, ‘Under governance the ultimate partnership activity is the formation of self-governing networks’ (Stoker 1998: 23; see also Davies 2002: 303). For Rhodes (and

Stoker) one of the characteristics of the 'self-governing network' is the degree of trust that has emerged (Davies 2002: 303).

Multi-organisational partnerships, moreover, as Lowndes and Skelcher (1998: 314, 319) have argued, can be associated with networks, hierarchy or market; that is, with different modes of governance. Indeed, they go on to argue that – in the context of urban regeneration – such partnerships may go through all three modes of governance. They also point out that partnerships do not necessarily always engender mutual benefit, trust and reciprocity (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998: 314; see also Davies 2002a: 304).

Rhodes appears to think that the growth of 'networks' in the role of delivering welfare services (his example), points to a change in governance mode (Rhodes 1997: 47). Lowndes and Skelcher might point out that this is an example of where the word 'network' is used instead of 'partnership', which may be a more accurate term, and may also call into question at least whether there had been a genuine change in the mode of governance.

New Labour's enthusiasm for "partnerships" in Britain has led most notably to the creation of Health Action Zones; Employment Zones; Education Action Zones and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). New Labour has therefore been seen (in the words of Bevir and Rhodes) 'as an enabling partner' that 'steers flexible networks' (cited in Knox 2002: 5).

The concept of a "policy network" is itself one that has attracted a degree of debate, even over the the itself (see for example Börzel, 1998). Rhodes identifies five forms of network, from policy communities to issue networks (Sandford 2006b: 235). Dowding (1995: 146-47; 2001: 95-96) would prefer to see the Rhodes model in this case as a *metaphor*, rather than something inherent in the model itself. It makes no assumptions and no predictions about types of networks, and so cannot be tested in a social scientific manner. This in turn brings us no closer to understanding the wider policy-making process.

Sandford (2006b: 222) has argued that the "civic engagement" that is currently occurring in the regions is best explained by 'network governance', particularly with

respect to Regional Assemblies. Civic engagement, he argues, implies something different from partnerships, which in this view are to be seen in terms of implementing policy or distributing public money, and not merely involved with policy making. The actors involved in civic engagement can be involved in a formal or semi-formal process, and actors who are either experienced policy actors or policy officers, and representing all kinds of organisations and groups or the public sector. The process, moreover, is not merely one of consultation, but one where the actors have a full part to play in policy making (Sandford 2006b: 222). The reasons put forward for civic engagement taking place at all are threefold: New Labour's commitment to wider political consultation; a wider trend towards "fragmented governance"; and the growing importance of conceptions of civil society from across Europe in general (Sandford 2006b: 223).

Taking inspiration from Rhodes, Sandford (2006: 236) characterises Regional Assemblies as a 'semi-formalized issue networks', and mentions the features that prompts this label, for example:

'They have large memberships, over 100 in some regions; they also convene a number of policy forums which consist of still more stakeholders in specialist areas, reaching out into the regions' civil society.'

They are, moreover, an 'interesting theoretical halfway-house' (Sandford 2006: 236). Interesting, perhaps, because this might be seen to demonstrate Dowding's point – Rhodes' "model" is a descriptive metaphor rather than predictive model. Nevertheless, it highlights a difficulty in categorising RAs.

The concept behind civic engagement and partnerships fit with the idea that there should be a move towards individual civic responsibility rather than collective state-based intervention, and that individuals and institutions should come together to form networks and relationships based on trust. (Richards & Smith 2001: 110; White 2001: 6).

Partnerships, however, do not necessarily imply a decentralisation of power. LSPs, bringing together as they do business, the public sector and the voluntary and community sector, have been charged with the development and implementation of community strategies; help local authorities set Public Sector Agreement targets and

meet them; and help develop and then deliver the local neighbourhood renewal strategy. Crucially, LSPs are non-statutory and non-executive – statutory responsibility ultimately lies with the local authority (Knox 2002: 3, 21).

Research on LSPs (and Education Action Zones) suggests that central government targets have undermined the supposed value of community-based partnerships, or even a central agenda to limit the role of the Voluntary and Community Sector merely to service delivery (Purdue, 2005: 16, 18-19). It has also been found that, under the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s, regeneration partnerships where Voluntary and Community (VCS) groups were involved in particular were not genuine partnerships as such as, but rather VCS groups were enlisted to implement service delivery for centrally inspired policy as much as anything else (Osborne 2002: 56).

New Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) guidance followed the New Labour election victory of 1997, apparently signalling a new approach to relations between central government and local partnerships and local government; yet the Local Government Act of 1999 gave central government extra powers, notably the right to enforce outsourcing. A key change to SRB that New Labour brought in was the idea of including not merely economic factors of regeneration, but also social, to address social exclusion. (Davies 2002: 170-71; 173-74).

Overall, early findings on the effectiveness of the ‘renewed’ SRB partnership working found complaints that they were too prescriptive; that they also limited the approaches that local actors could take as they were bound up with the bureaucracy involved in the development of local strategies, putting together complex bids, and then carrying out evaluations. This had the effect of leaving ‘disempowered local politicians and strategically minded business leaders’ and who were spending too much time ‘in committee rooms doing the government’s bidding’ (Davies 2002a: 174).

This would seem to be in line with other findings. Liddle (2001) also found that, in the North East at least, within the *framework* of regeneration – including as it does sub-regional partnerships led by local authorities and RDAs – there exists a ‘gap between the ideas of flexibility, and responsive management and the traditional bureaucratic logic,’ and a ‘managerial fix rather than a new form of political articulation’, precisely because

the local authorities were leading the partnerships (Liddle 2001: 322). One of the issues in the North East which Liddle remarks upon is the way in which stakeholders were selected to join the partnerships. Rather than with the aim of representation, stakeholders were chosen on the basis that they could fit organisational resources and capacities with the objectives of the regional economic strategy (Liddle 2001: 320).

In general, the evidence that partnerships and networks themselves offer a devolution or decentralisation of power tends, on the whole, to be lacking – the presumption of which is something that Christopoulos warns against (Christopoulos 2008: 476).

In his examination of local political institutions and their experiences of urban regeneration, Davies (2002) finds that the story there is one of increasing political centralisation; where hierarchy, market and network modes are mixed, it is hierarchy that is dominant (Davies 2002: 319). Davies suggests that, although the state may be surrendering direct control, it is also trying to gain wider effective control (Davies 2002: 315). Indeed, partnerships tend to reflect central political priorities: Davies comments that the ‘influence of the centre over the locality appears to be growing’ and that ‘policy partnerships’ are instruments of central government (Davies 2002: 313).

At the regional level, governance within the regions involves a number of “partners”, along with the three main institutions – the Regional Assemblies, the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and the Government Offices. One of the issues commentators have raised is in deciding who is a “regional partner” and how they differ from a “key partner” – in the context of an ambiguity between “stakeholders” and “key stakeholders” (see Henig (2003: 11)).

In terms of regional “key partners”, there has been an interesting development in the terminology employed within the South West. The Regional Economic Strategy there refers to partners as being businesses, local authorities, their sub-regional partners in local projects, and community and voluntary actors. However, the phrase “key partners” only occurs once in this context – the correct nomenclature preferred by the RDA is “delivery partner”. This apparently solves the thorny issue of deciding who are to be “partners” and who are to be “key” partners (for example, see SWRDA 2006d: 6; see also SWRDA 2006c: 50).

Partnerships have been used and continue to be used as a tool to “manage” local and regional governance (Tomaney and Pike 2006: 131), and figure prominently within the governance architecture at the regional tier within England. The key word is “manage”, as it has been argued that central government has retained a significant level of control over the scope and content of these strategies, while sub-regional partnerships, at least, have been seen to be a “managerial fix” (Liddle 2001: 322; Pearce & Ayres 2005: 591; Tomaney 2002c: 235). This idea coincides with the ideas of Kooiman (2003), MacLeod & Goodwin (1999) and March, *et al.* (2003) discussed above.

5.2 Governance in the English Regions

The attention now switches to the experiences within the English regions, focusing in particular on the two case studies, the East of England and the South West. The extent of central government ‘management’ of policy in the regions will be demonstrated, and it is argued, therefore, that the asymmetrical power model provides a better template with which to understand governance in the regions, rather than (for example) the hollow state thesis. The regional institutions are better seen as “advisory” bodies to the central government, which in turn controls the emerging regional institutions by proscribing their actions. It will be seen that the concept of metagovernance, whereby state authority is eroded, also does not appear to “fit” the evidence. Rather, Kooiman’s view of the hierarchical state (one that is entirely compatible with the asymmetrical power model) best describes what actually is happening within the context of English regions.

5.2.1 The Government Offices (GOs)

The oldest and most significant – yet least prominent – regional institution is the Government Office (GO). Created in 1994, there are currently nine GOs in the regions, and these have been significantly expanded – particularly in 2000 – to include representatives from nine Whitehall departments. By the time the *Review of Government Offices* (2006) was carried out by the Treasury, there were 3,114, with a further 564 (mostly Children Fund and Sure Start) staff having been co-located within the GO network (HMT 2006b: 7-9). Most of the work that the GOs engage with (53%)

is related to the administration of central government or European programs and grants. A further 20% of their time is spent on specific policy themes, and only a fraction of the GOs' work (5%) is taken up with regional strategies (HMT 2006b: 10).

As an indication of size, the total spending power that goes through the GOs, at £9billion (HMT 2004b: 37), dwarfs that of the £2billion of the RDAs collectively (ODPM 2005c: 5), the next largest regional institution in terms of budget. The *administrative* budget alone for the network was £149million in 2004-05, falling to £144million in 2006-07 (RCU 2004: 12). This lower figure is still more than seven times than the budget of the Regional Assemblies, which was £19million in total 2006-07 (Hansard, Written Answer 17 Oct 2005: Column 815W). In 2004, the GOs were, however, subject to no fewer than forty Public Service Agreements (PSAs), mostly as a result of their funding departments (HMT 2004b: 37).

A Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) was set up in 2000 and located in ODPM, following the Performance and Innovation Unit report of the same year, to better coordinate the activities of the Government Office network, to act as a corporate headquarters for the network, and concerned with areas of Human Resources and Information Technology support. By 2004, this had 70 staff (HMT 2006b: 7, 30). No doubt it was the RCU that in 2004 re-designed the various GO web sites, linking them together into a seamless Government Office experience, with virtually identical layouts to each other: the only obvious point of difference being the background colouring. This is, of course, itself an outward indication of a centralising tendency.

The perceived problem as to whether the Government Offices represent the Government in the regions, or the regions to the Government, has been a perennial one, however. Mawson (1997) commented on this problem, and a regional assembly member from the East of England again cited this as an area of ambiguity, nine years after Mawson's observation. The GO is seen as ambiguous between representing the region to central government on the one hand and/or representing central government within the region on the other; if anything, it would appear that the GOs are better at representing central government at regional level than the region to central government:

‘They [GOSW] are an arm of central government; they have to represent central government in the regions [...] They should have an equally important role in representing the views of the region back to central government; how well they fulfil that role, I’m not too sure’ (Interview A)

But there might be evidence of a tilt in the balance towards the region:

‘GO-East in the past hasn’t decided whether it’s an arm of government telling local government and the East of England what to do, or whether its role is to hear what people in the East of England want, and represent that to Whitehall. We think we should be telling them of our concerns and they should be acting on our behalf. I think we’re getting more towards that.’ (Interview B)

Although another East of England assembly member saw things a little more clearly:

‘The Government Office doesn’t argue our corner; that’s one of our problems, really, the degree to which the Government Office bats for the region. The Government Office bat for Whitehall [...] When it comes to a basic disagreement between the region, and the local authorities in particular, and Government, the Government Office will not bat for the region: they are an arm of Whitehall.’ (Interview E)

The 2006 review of GOs also pointed to the ambiguity in the role that GOs perform (HMT 2006b: 5). There was no such ambiguity in the Treasury two years earlier in the 2004 Spending Review, however. This defined the GOs as having a ‘key role as part of central government in the regions’ (HMT 2004a: 9), and it echoes the Devolved Decision Making Review of the same year, which stated that: ‘Government Offices represent the central government in the regions’ that ‘manage relationships with regional stakeholders on behalf of central government’ (HMT 2004b: 37).

The picture is not entirely clear, but it seems that from the time that Mawson was writing in 1997 until the present, the GOs generally have conducted a balancing act, at times tilting a little more to central government, and at other times slightly more in favour of the region.

There is also a focus on the local level for the GOs, which is also a key part of the first of three new objectives set for GOs, and one that calls for improved delivery at regional and local levels, as well as between local areas. The work GOs have already done on LAAs represents something of a template for the future strategic overview GOs will have, with Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) negotiations being merged with LAA negotiation and the content of LAAs expanding bringing more work for GOs to oversee. Indeed, LAAs are ‘transforming GO activity from departmental grant management to negotiations with local partners’ (HMT 2006b: 19). As such, their new role will be less departmental based, and more focussed around localities, and GOs will ‘have closer contact with, and knowledge of, specific local places and partners than central government’ (HMT 2006b: 16). Furthermore, LAA negotiations will put the GOs ‘at the heart of government’s relationship with local authorities’ (HMT 2006b: 16). The GO for the North West is singled out as an example (presumably of “best practice”) as a GO that is developing these new, closer relationships with local authorities (HMT 2006b 17).

The GOs are therefore often part of any ‘partnership’ installed *within* the region as well as at regional level. For example, partnerships figure prominently in one of the government flagship schemes, Neighbourhood Renewal. This is a national policy administered at a local level by the Government Offices (GOs) – the region itself (outside of the GO) has no role to play.

The second objective set out for GOs also has a local focus, in terms of feeding back on policy implementation and advice that ‘reflect the delivery challenges and local approaches’ to the locality – as well as the region as a whole (HMT 2006b: 17).

However, it is the third objective that has as an explicit *regional* focus. This objective sees the GOs as challenging and supporting the strategies developed at a regional level by the RDAs and RAs. Apparently, GOs have a ‘key analytical role’ in offering up insights into how the various strategies relate to one another. In particular, with regard to the Regional Spatial Strategies (see below) and the Regional Economic Strategies (RESs) – the two statutory regional strategies and arguably the two most important regional strategies – the GO maintains either an ambiguous role of representing central government yet offering a regional point of view in the form of ‘critical friends’, owing to

their ‘regionally rooted experience’ (HMT 2006b: 18), or simply represents national government (HMT 2004b; see also below)

Other announcements of changes were included within the 2006 Budget. Plans were outlined to reduce the number of staff in the Government Offices network by *at least* thirty-three per cent: despite appearances to the contrary, this is not a Government cutback but rather a measure in order to help the Government Offices network in ‘seizing the opportunity to streamline activity’(!) (HM Treasury 2006a: 143). The smaller Government Office network will – it is hoped – have a more strategic role, and their relationship and accountability with the departments of central government are to be ‘strengthened’, in part through an emphasis on outcomes rather than processes (HM Treasury 2006a: 143; HM Treasury 2006b: 19).

5.2.2 The Regional Assemblies

If the growth of governance is associated with the influence of new actors on policy making, as Tomaney and Pike (2006: 130) put it, then this is most strongly represented at the regional level by the Regional Assemblies (RAs). The development of RAs and the process described by Sandford (2006b) as ‘civic engagement’ (discussed above) can be seen as having gone largely hand in hand.

The RAs were set up in 1999 at the same time as the RDAs, in order to scrutinise the work of the RDAs – although the RDAs themselves are not accountable to the RAs but to Whitehall ministers. RAs themselves are also only voluntary bodies and not statutory – a fact often overlooked – with the composition of the RAs following a 70%/30% split between local authority membership and a miscellaneous group referred to as ‘social and economic partners’ (Stephenson & Poxon 2001: 115-16).

While the RAs may be loosely defined as a policy network, as Sandford (above) suggests, it should be made clear that these are not the “self-organising networks” that Rhodes, for examples, associates with governance (as discussed above) but rather networks that at best have an “advisory” role to Government (although see p196 for the limits of that particular role) and are “controlled” by Government in a hierarchical relationship.

Another way of viewing RAs, following Knox (2002: 5-8) might be as a 'delivery partnership'.

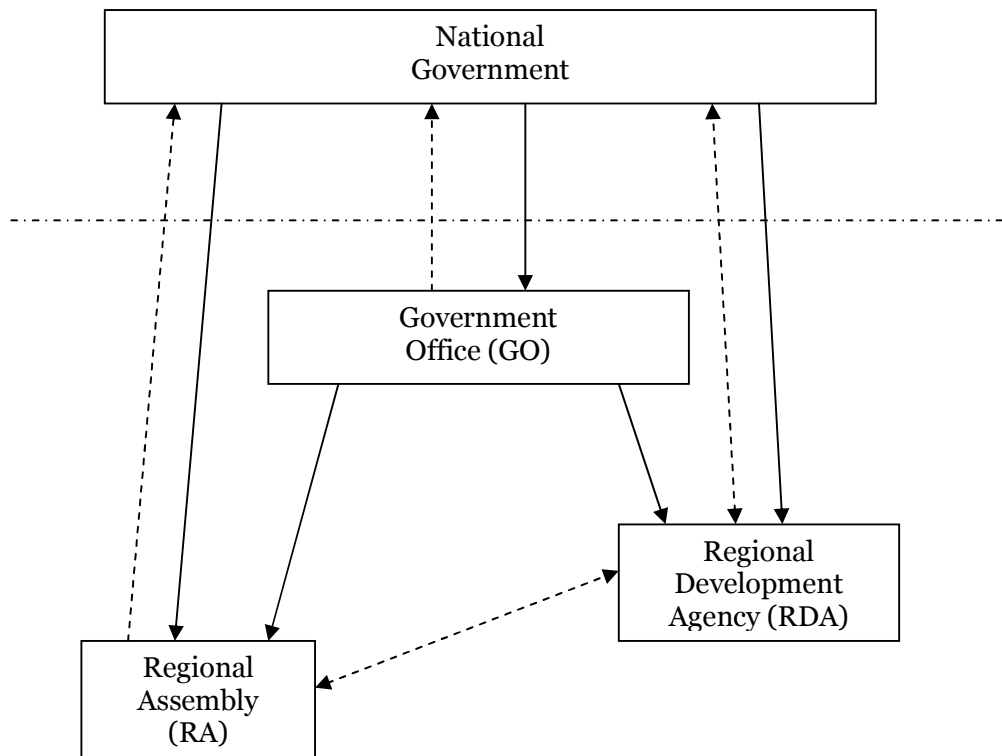


Fig 6 This diagram represents the triangular relationship between the regional institutions and the national government, as well as the hierarchical nature of this relationship. The bottom-up, “advisory” nature of the roles of the regional institutions is shown by the hashed arrows; the solid arrows show the top-down, “control” nature of the relationship between, on the one hand, Government and the regional institutions, and, on the other hand, between the GO (in its role of representing the Government) and the other regional institutions. Also shown is the “advisory” nature of the relationship between the RDAs and the RAs.

A 2005 ODPM report identified five principal roles that are performed by the RAs:

1. Scrutiny of RDAs – a statutory requirement
2. The preparation and delivery of the RSS and monitoring of the Local Development Frameworks (LDFs).

3. The development and coordination, or 'joining-up', of policy at the regional level
4. To strengthen – and widen – regional level partnership working with other stakeholders
5. To influence policy at regional, national and European levels as a “voice of the region”.

A sixth “role” identified concerned that of corporate affairs, managing an increasing number of resources, staff and workload, although this was not seen strictly as a role on a par with the other five (ODPM 2005b: 8).

The fourth role, the partnership working role, was identified in the ODPM's *Interim Report: Evaluation of the Role and Impact of Regional Assemblies* (2005b) as one of the key areas for evaluation, and “to strengthen partnership working at regional level” is considered to be an ‘important aim’ (ODPM 2005b: 44). This emphasises *central government's* view on what the role of the RAs are.

Both the East of England and South West were identified as two regions that did not have a history of partnership working at the regional level (ODPM 2005b: 6), although a partial exception must be the Regional Planning Conferences:

‘If we go back a number of years before the Regional Assembly was in place, there was an assembly before that, a voluntary assembly just of local representatives: county councillors, district councillors; elected members [...] that was purely a voluntary thing, just local authorities getting together to lobby Government.’ (Interview B).

‘Originally, under the guise of the regional planning conference, that was the forum of the local authorities, and we had officers working together, and from that came the RPG10’ (Interview A)

‘Prior to that [the Regional Planning Conference] there was the Joint Advisory Group of Wiltshire, Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset – JAGWAGS.’ (Interview D).

Nevertheless, that a lack of partnership working was remarked upon underlines the change that the central government's RA initiative, and wider regionalisation program, has attempted to bring about.

One of the ways in which RAs have promoted partnership working has been through the offer of a place on the Assembly for non-local authority actors. This has led to the creation of (for example) faith forums, transport forums and voluntary sector forums that represent groups within the region and has helped – in most regions – to foster a sense of a “regional”, rather than a local, perspective, although to varying degrees from region to region (ODPM 2005a: 44-45, 47). This is a point that has been corroborated with interview evidence collected by the author from the East of England and the South West, and deserves amplification.

One striking example was the increased perceived importance of the RA in the South West that led to the formation of the transport forum; a counterpart transport forum, however, has not yet been replicated in the East, for reasons that are not entirely clear. This suggests that while the RA has helped the formation of particular groups, they are not a sufficient factor.

The Chair of the South West's transport forum – Travel Watch South West (TWSW) – sits on the South West Regional Assembly as a social and economic partner, has been able to take a strategic *regional* overview, as compared with local authority members in general, who tend to defend their local “patch”:

‘...one of the more useful things from the regional point of view that, as a social and economic partner, I and others have been able to do has been to take a regional perspective, when very often local government members of the Regional Assembly are driven by their immediate local concerns.’ (Interview C).

On that latter point, it was remarked by another interviewee that:

‘There's quite a lot of that, and probably a bit too much of it at times. If you're a regional body, you should really be thinking regionally and not locally. One interesting case that came up concerned the second strategic route in the South

West, and whether it should go through the A303-A30 or the A358-A5. The Secretary of State said we can't have both; the Regional Assembly's got to decide which. And it came down almost to a casting vote [...] It shows how the region isn't thinking as a region because the vote was mostly split along geographical lines' (Interview D).

Clearly, then, there are some issues which will divide the Assembly at the expense of a 'regional' overview.

Other interview evidence demonstrates the degree to which RAs can be instrumental in creating "regional forums", which then send a member to sit on the Regional Assembly. The emergence of faith and transport forums in the South West in this respect is illustrative:

'[...] the Assembly had been mindful that under PPG11 it now had an obligation to talk to users' organisations [...] We realised we had a common interest: the Assembly wanted a forum created; I had a potentially statutory obligation to co-operate with other transport users' (Interview C).

'[The South West Council of Faiths] came into being because the Regional Chamber/Assembly said that a person representing the faith communities had to have a nominating body. There was no nomination body, so we created one [...] it came as a result of an enquiry from the Regional Chamber' (Interview G).

The difference here is that, on the one hand, Planning Policy Guidance 11 was set nationally, unlike the requirement for a faith forum. Nevertheless, a regional transport forum with a transport Assembly member appears to be a South West initiative as the East of England does not have an equivalent.

In the East of England, the East of England Faiths Council (EEFC) was created in 2002, five years after the SWFC, and had to approach the Regional Assembly for membership:

'Almost all of the other regions had a faith seat – some had two. [...] We were looking to have channels to make an input into the development of the region,

and that's one of them; others are close engagement with our RDA and Government Office [...] We feel that there needs to be a recognition of the spiritual life in all its strategies [...] In some regions, the Regional Chamber [as it then was] did actually fund a faiths forum so that it did have something to draw on. Ours [EERA] said it was not their role to fund people to give representation' (Interview F)

The finding here to emerge is that, a proactive Regional Assembly may inspire a regional forum as has happened in the South West with the SWCF and TWSW. This may be seen as indicative of the way Assemblies may create a regional space for actors to emerge. Otherwise, the forum either does not appear (in the case of transport in the East of England) or it takes longer to get established (in the case of the EEFC).

The case of the EEFC also suggests the extent to which the role of central government, through its GOs, may also be important in terms of recognition as a "key partner" in the regions, and how important individual relationships are in those institutions:

'There's an organisation in Suffolk that's very hot on supplying inter-faith educational material [and it] decided it wanted to set up a regional faiths network as well, which is called the Faiths' Agency. This doesn't have any meetings, and it's a sort of virtual network and it's not very clear what it does. There are only three key people involved [...] In its early days, these people had a good relationship with somebody who was quite keen at the Government Office and who has since moved to London, to the Home Office. He gave them some support which sort of muddled the waters from Government Office point of view as to who was actually acting on behalf of the faith communities. Gradually they've come to realise that what we're doing is pretty representative and active and they've been to our meetings and they've come around to treating us as a key partner, but it's taken a while' (Interview F).

Moreover, in the East of England at least, there is a suggestion that the government's regionalisation agenda generally can prompt a response by "social and economic partners", rather than specifically a response to the creation of RAs:

‘When the RDA was being set up it was obvious that the Churches in the region needed to find new ways of responding to what was happening in terms of being able to make an input into regional development. So we go together as an *ad hoc* group so that we could put forward a document [in 2000] to the nascent RDA to explain our contribution to, and involvement with, the life of the region.’

To formalise this group, the East of England Churches Network was set-up ‘to act as a liaison point with bodies of regional governance’ and ‘to be instrumental in influencing the various strategies of the region’. In 2002, the EEFC was set up with similar aims. It exists as a formal expression of the East of England Churches Network’s desire to include other faiths in its work. Although it is keen that the EEFC itself remains autonomous, the EEFC is funded by the Network in lieu of any other funding sources (Interview F).

This is also the case in the South West, where the South West Council of Faiths (SWCF) Assembly member is also a part time regional officer for the Church Leaders in the South West. Moreover:

‘The South West Council of Faiths was originally encouraged by Church leaders sometime ago. [Since then] a South West Churches Forum has been set up to look at matters of social concern, which falls into the ambit of regional government, such as it is. [...] Some notice has to be taken that there are other faiths [...] what we’ve decided to do is that the South West Churches Forum would be run in parallel, so when there is a meeting of this Forum, we would invite people to come to a meeting of the South West Council of Faiths’ (Interview G).

Again, this is because of a lack of resources for the SWCF (it receives no funding from the Assembly), and which threatened the existence of the Council.

Meanwhile:

‘The Transport Act 2000 required gave what were then the Rail Passenger Committees [RPCs], organised on railway regions, the duty to co-operate with other organisations representing the interests of other public passenger transport [...] There was no statutory bus users representation, nothing for ferries, not

really anything for airports; so I managed to persuade the RPC to put up money to fund the creation of a forum’

A key finding, then, is that while regional actors appear to have emerged, they often do so from bodies already active – be they rail passenger forums or church groups. These groups have then responded to the Government’s regional agenda and have adapted to this, in terms of the geographic area covered and in terms of composition, perhaps to include other faith groups or other modes of transport as necessary. Indeed, in the East of England, there almost appears to be a desire on the behalf of the churches to try and prove to the “nascent RDA” their worth as partners, perhaps from a feeling that their traditional role may be under threat in some way. It would make an interesting area for future research.

Nevertheless, the RAs have been seen to have particular strengths in building and maintaining partnerships than would have existed previously through informal local authority-based partnerships (ODPM 2005a: 47), and the membership of the RAs allows for the development of professional relationships at the regional level that otherwise may not have happened – reminding us of Sandford (2006b: 236). This also comes out in the importance that was attached by the EEFC to become formally involved with EERA.

Travel Watch South West is a good example of how membership of an RA can facilitate relations between members, offering a “networking” role. It is clear that the transport forum has been able to use Regional Assembly connections to its own advantage and in a different way to that which was necessarily intended:

‘It [the Assembly] is undoubtedly a remarkable networking point [...] We’re getting ready for the cross-country franchise [...] We want to shape the way Government thinks about its consultation document, and, using regional assembly networks, we’ve been doing seminars – one in Plymouth, one in Bristol, another one in Bournemouth next month [...] The starting point with these sorts of things, you tend to talk with the Chamber of Commerce people, or the CBI. I know them well because I sit with them on the Regional Assembly. I think if I was just the Travel Watch South West it would be more difficult for me because

I'd have to pick up the phone and say, 'Can I speak to someone about...' Where actually what we do is we share databases, mailing lists and so on.' (Interview C.)

So it is obvious that being a member of the RA has enabled connections to be made that can then be used in other situations outside of purely Regional Assembly matters, and this may perhaps be seen as the tentative beginnings of a regional elite beyond the formal structures that have been centrally inspired.

Moreover, there is a suggestion that the RA is beginning to create a regional point of view that is then put to Government. One interviewee noted that:

'We are not always fully supportive of what Government wants and in many cases we will lobby very hard for local areas and their local needs. I think we've increasingly done that in the last two or three years [...] We have been more robust in putting forward concerns of the councils across the East of England as a collective group [...] it's the way the organisation has matured' (Interviewee B).

Yet on the other hand, the same interviewee, contrasting the old planning system with the new system, noted that:

'Everyone seems to have wanted massive changes that at the end of the day don't seem to change very much. You just wonder if the Government is trying to make work for itself and for everybody else [...] I would say, what has the Region added, what added value has it given, over and above the previous system where the counties did it, and I would have said, very little, really.' (Interview B).

The sense here is not one of fundamental change at all, but perhaps more the *appearance* of change. The caveat that might be made here is that this is within the context of planning (discussed in more detail below) which, while forming the major concern of the Assemblies, is not the only one. Against this, however, was this view:

'It is my view now that, seeing the way that it has worked, if you put your mind to making it work, it does fulfil a function. It has brought all the regional bodies together; it can get cross-party consensus; it can do a role of lobbying, if you are united. I think that those three or four points together leads to my view that

there is role for... you don't have to call them 'assemblies', but some sort of regional structure'. (Interview A).

The point worth making is that both the interviewees quoted are Conservative Councillors, and that the Conservative Party is still pledged to abolish Regional Assemblies.

Despite, for the most part, the apparent ambiguity seen in the role of the GO in the region noted above, the relationship between the RAs and the Government Offices is close:

'The relationship is fairly close. The Government Office [of the South West] clearly takes an interest in what we're doing... they sit on our committees, and they're there to proffer advice and guidance where necessary. The Government Office comes to most of the main meetings. So there are some fairly close linkages.' (Interview A).

It would appear, moreover, that a good relationship with the GO can have its benefits:

'I think that we have a good relationship with the officers of Go-East. I think many of them have been very helpful in the past few years; it's one reason I point to [for] the amount out of resource we've managed to secure' (Interview B).

Although the South West was still waiting to hear the result of one particular transport bid, it was noted that:

'The Department of Transport had been favourably impressed by what the South West Regional Assembly had put together; this was not the same reaction that they'd given to other regions [...] certainly the sort of discussions we had with the RDA and the Government Office South West, the stuff we were putting in and the way it went in, we had them on board.' (Interview D)

Active co-operation with the GO is seen as important, then, either for successful bids or at least for potentially successful bids. This implies that the RA is a more junior partner in relation to the well-placed GO.

5.3 The 2004 Spending Review and the policy areas of the regions

The 2004 Spending Review solicited views from the regions in the form of Regional Emphasis Documents (REDs). The subsequent report, *Meeting Regional Priorities*, provides (perhaps unwitting) examples of the limitations placed on regional institutions. For example, with regard to investment in rail, it is very obvious that there is only one person in the country that makes any decision about investment in railways – the Secretary of State for Transport. A request by some regions for grants to make small-scale, local improvements was firmly rejected (HMT 2004: 11).

Nevertheless, the Spending Review report highlights clearly the areas with which regions as a whole have an opinion, even if there is no direct responsibility. Apart from employment, education and skills, enterprise, innovation, and knowledge transfer (covered in the previous chapter), the other areas of policy at the regional level are for the most part: planning and transport; housing; the environment; rural issues; regeneration; the environment and culture and tourism (HMT 2004b 49-67).

The level of regional competence in these areas varies considerably, and there are some where no specific regional competence exists. Concerns raised by regions about ‘children and young people’ received by way of reply figures that detailed how much the Chancellor is spending on Children’s Social Services, and details of the Sure Start and Children’s Centre programmes. There was little in the way of influencing national policy, and it is clear that these were national government programmes fulfilling a national government agenda (HMT 2004a: 23-24).

Other schemes claimed to exemplify the government’s commitment to ‘devolved decision-making’ are simply national schemes outside of local authority or regional institutions, such as the New Deal, Job Centre Plus or the creation of Employment Zones (HMT 2004b: 68).

5.4 Regional Housing Strategies

Regional Housing Statements (HSs) were introduced to all nine English regions in 1999, and were produced by the Government Offices and Housing Corporation regional offices, in partnership with Local Authorities and “key players” (undefined). There was no standard format, and this allowed the HSs to reflect regional variations (DETR 2001: 2). An evaluation on HSs by the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) found that in some regions, but not all, voluntary and community sector groups, RDAs and health authorities were consulted. Others merely consulted Regional Social Landlords and Local Authorities. Problems that were found included a lack of representation from tenant organisations and the private sector (essentially landlords, mortgage lenders, estate agents, developers). This in part was due to a lack of regional level structure in both cases; however, where the tenant and resident organisations were keen to participate, the private sector was for the most part uninterested (DETR 2001: 3).

Cole (2003: 225) found that the Statements “broadly accepted the main contours of Government housing policy”, and in any case had to be signed off by the Secretary of State.

Scepticism was expressed in the 2001 DETR evaluation as to whether the Statements could ever become Strategies, because of scepticism over the ability to gain a regional consensus and the lack of an accountable body to implement and monitor the strategy (DETR 2001: 5).

Nevertheless, these doubts and reservations seemed to have been overcome in the intervening years. Regional Housing Strategies (RHSs) were for the most part developed during 2005, led by the Regional Assemblies. The East of England had developed what it called a Regional Housing Strategy to cover the years 2003-2006. This had been produced by the Regional Housing Forum (RHF) for the Regional Housing Board (RHB). RHBs turn had been set up in the Regions to deliver the Government’s Sustainable Communities Plan (SCP). The SCP put in place a Single Housing Investment Pot (SHIP), and the first Strategy in the East was designed to help target this investment (RHF 2003:

4). However, it was later admitted to be merely a 'descriptive statement' (EERA 2005: 11), rather than a strategy, to deliver SCP.

Nevertheless, this early Strategy did put in place ideas and themes that would re-emerge in the 2005-10 RHS, precisely because SCP is the domineering factor in these strategies.

Before going to look at, in particular, the recent housing strategies of the South West and the East of England, it is necessary to put these into a national context.

As already mentioned, the SCP was published by Government in 2003, and this created the single pot, made up of two funds: the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) and the Approved Development Programme (ADP). (RHF 2003: 28). The priority of the RHSs, first and foremost, is to deliver SCP. This covers four of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets, namely PSA targets 1, 5, 7 and 8.

During 2004, the Housing Act was passed, which had a number of implications for regions. Notable amongst these was the changes to the previous Regional Planning Guidance regime – documents called 'Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) now had to be prepared by regions. As well as including transport and minerals strategies, these covered such areas as economic development, health, culture and the environment, as well as dealing with housing allocations and the planning system. These also have an in-built sub-regional focus (SWRA 2006).

Furthermore, in 2005, the Sustainable Communities initiative also produced three other documents that the RHSs incorporated into their thinking: *Sustainable Communities – Homes for All*; *Sustainable Communities – People, Places, and Prosperity*; and *Sustainable Communities – Settled Homes, Settled Lives*.

Other policy initiatives that impact upon the RHSs are *Fuel Poverty in England: The Government's Plan For Action* (2004) (SWRA 2005: 44) and the Key Workers Living Initiative (EERA: 2005: 16).

Besides explicit national policy, the tone also betrays more general characteristics of New Labour thinking. For example, the idea of giving opportunities to people in order that

they may contribute and therefore be entitled to benefit comes through in sentences like this one from the RHS 2003-06: ‘it would be sad indeed if we were to forget those for whom affordable housing is critical *if they are to have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the Region’s success.*’ [my emphasis] (RHF 2003: 9), or this from the 2005-10 Strategy: ‘the opportunity to contribute to, and benefit from, the Region’s economic dynamism’ (EERA 2005: 14). Although exactly what these *regional* “benefits” are is left undefined, it can be argued that this demonstrates the New Labour idea of who would be deserving of “benefits”, (namely the people who contribute to economic success) as well as assuming that the ‘Region’ (note capital ‘r’) not only has the regional infrastructure to deliver these benefits, but that the concept of the ‘Region’ actually makes sense to those who live within its boundaries. The idea of everyone “pulling together” for the economic success of the nation is a “third way” notion of responsible citizenship, as already noted before (see also, for example White, in White, ed: 2001: 5); except this time, the focus is on the ‘Region’ rather than the nation. It is a notion that, for example, one finds in the 2004 report from the *Devolving Decision Making Review* (DDMR). Here, a comparison between regional employment rates was not seen as sufficiently enlightening, and a helpful chart was produced which showed ‘regional inactivity rates’ (HMT 2004b: 29) to capture all of the population under 65 that the Government deemed to be ‘economically inactive’.

This strong national policy background dictated to a large extent the shape and form of the RHSs. In particular, there are three strategic aims within both the East of England’s document and the South West’s which are identical: decent homes, sustainable communities and a ‘balanced’ housing market (EERA 2005: 4-5; SWRA 2005: 5). Likewise, the key seven investment themes are identical: rural, regeneration, growth, local needs/homelessness, Key Workers, Black and Minority Ethnic and rural (for example, see EERA 2005: 66-67). Incidentally, this builds on the original five investment themes identified in the East of England’s 2003-2006 RHS, which were social (‘supported’) housing, rural, BME, regeneration and growth (RHF 2003: 8).

These aims and themes provide the shape to the documents, and regional differences are placed *within* this otherwise heavily prescribed framework. In fact, on thematic investment, Government only offers guidance on Key Workers (EERA 2005: 68). Thus there is a regionally specific issue for the East of England: with regard to Gypsies and

Travellers: Government research has it that 25% of England's Gypsy and Travellers live in caravans and trailers within the East of England (EERA 2005: 42). Again for the East of England, affordable housing for public sector workers is a concern: but this is a problem for an area called the 'Greater South East' and in part is dealt with at national level (EERA 2005: 46). The point here is that it demonstrates to some degree the problem of taking the East of England in isolation of London: London clearly affects the economies and the people of both the East of England and the South East, as, indeed, Tickell and John (2003) have pointed out. The "unnaturalness" of these "regions" is therefore highlighted.

Although both documents talk about sub-regions, the South West RHS is vague on the subject, suggesting that it would 'promote greater understanding of the sub-regional housing markets', suggesting areas where a 'sub-regional approach can be helpful' or 'should be encouraged' (SWRA 2005: 10, 13). This is in stark contrast with the East of England, which appears to be further developed in its sub-regional thinking. Clearly present in the 2003-2006 RHS with their own specific chapters, there is in the 2005-2010 RHS a clear diagram of how sub-regional strategies fit with the overall RHS – at least, in theory. Indeed, sub-regions were 'instrumental in shaping both RHS' (EERA 2005: 76). The sub-regional strategies, for the East of England, do not constitute a regional strategy. Rather, 'the RHS is the "glue" that holds national and local priorities together'. Local strategies (ideally) would be nested in their sub-regional strategies, and the sub-regional strategies would be in turn nested within the RHS, with the regional strategy 'complementing' sub-regional thinking (EERA 2005: 11). The nine East of England sub-regions developed their strategies in tandem with RHS 2005-2010 (EERA 2005: 12).

Deciding that there should be sub-regions appears not to have been an organic, bottom-up process, but one that is decided either at the regional, or by central government itself:

'They [sub-regions] are usually sub-regional areas that have been defined by Government, such as the London-Stansted-Peterborough Corridor [...] and also the Thames Gateway [...] Within the Regional Spatial Strategy, we've also identified special sub-sects of the [East of England] Plan, focussing on their needs'. (Interviewee B).

‘you can say the London Arc isn’t [an artificial creation], because there is a commonality of interest amongst all of those towns and countryside that lie just to the north of London that are surrounded by greenbelt’ (Interview E).

In the East, there is a more of history of sub-regions; the sub-regions within the South West are a little more amorphous, and came about as a result of the regional spatial strategy (RSS):

‘We decided some while back that we couldn’t have a one-size-fits-all across the region [...] because of the disparity in GDP, and so forth, we had to break this down into manageable sub-regions; they’re not a sub-region with clear geographical boundaries; they’re just trying to get a better feel for the region as a whole by breaking it down.’ (Interview A)

This point within the context of metagovernance is interesting. On the one hand, the world of governance, for Jessop, the emergence of a sub-regional scale does represent a proliferation of scales he describes as a feature of governance; on the other hand as the document discussed above underlines, the sub-region is a “nested” scale. In other words, there is a clear hierarchy as far as this policy area is concerned: one that starts at the top with central government and feeds down through the regions into the sub-regions and finally through to the local. This is, then, quite the opposite of the ‘tangled hierarchies rather than simply nested’ (Jessop 1998: 39) that characterises governance.

It is important to emphasise that it is not the sub-region itself that is necessarily new, so much as the policy areas covered (as highlighted below). The development of the sub-region, in that respect, mirrors that of the regional assembly. Again, it is tied up with the previous planning regime:

‘Back in the 1970s when the county council was putting together its first structural plan, they wanted to talk to local amenity societies and district level federations, and the planning officer said, well, I can’t talk to you all, can you form a county federation that I can talk to. So that sort of thing has been going on a long, long time; it tends to be the same sort of organisations.’ (Interview D).

Cole (2003: 229-30) questioned how well the Housing Strategies would sit with the RESs. The picture has if anything become more complicated, but in theory the relationships are set out clearly. In the East, the function of the RHS is to deliver the RSSs, and 'to support the RES'. (EERA 2005: 11). It also serves to further the aims of the Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS) (EERA 2005: 3), and the IRS is referred to frequently throughout the document.

In the South West, however, the South West Housing Board has taken the opportunity to make recommendations to the developing RSS. For example, the SWHB stated that it wish to see a 'sufficient housing growth allocation' to support the RHS's aim of creating a more 'balanced' market and to reduce homelessness (SWRA 2005: 13). Similarly, the stated aim of the RHS with regard to the RES was that the two strategies should be 'mutually re-enforcing' and that the RHS should 'influence the review' of the RES during 2005 (SWRA 2005: 13). The question of course is how successful this was.

In contrast to the East of England, the South West's IRS was only mentioned four times, and then twice to merely state that the RHS is 'within the context' of the IRS (eg SWRA 2005: 3). The South West's document does clearly refers to the Regional Sustainable Development Framework, while the East of England's says more or less in passing that it 'embraces' it, but notes that it needs 'updating and expansion' (EERA 2005: 24).

Nevertheless, it is important not to overplay the differences between these two documents. One finding from this examination of the RHSs confirms Cole (2003: 231) when he points out that, although likely to change, the 'role of central Government is unlikely to *diminish*.' [emphasis in original]. Cole cites Jessop, and it is in keeping with Jessop's view of metagovernance, for example, when Jessop (2003: 15) claims that states 'get involved in redesigning markets, in constitutional change and the juridical re-regulation of organizational forms and objectives [...] They provide the ground rules for governance and the regulatory order in and through which governance partners can pursue their aims'. The state has changed its role, it has changed the way in which funding works, but it is ultimately still very much in control. In a similar vein, however, one might also point to the asymmetrical power model posited by Marsh, *et al.*, (2003), discussed above.

Two examples of the scale of central government involvement in housing are shown in the 2004 Spending Review report. It was clear that some regions – the South East in particular – felt a priority for them was that the Right to Buy scheme needed amending. This would either mean giving local authorities the power to lower the discount or even suspend Right to Buy. The first point to make here is that any increase in power would go to local, not regional authorities, as it is they who administer this scheme. The government's response was not to give any such power over to local authorities. It did not see the need to suspend Right to Buy, although it did in some places reduce the discount in some places – but it was clear that it was central government that was reducing the discount (HMT 2004: 19). What this shows is the government successfully maintaining its authority. It has not been dissipated in some form of governance, and is in keeping with the claims made by the asymmetrical power model.

Robinson (2003) in his analysis of housing policy in the regions also made the point that 'the regional agenda in England represented, first and foremost, a "top-down" effort to manufacture an administrative tier to assist with the implementation of policy.' (Robinson 2003: 265). That conclusion still appears to remain valid.

Cole (2003: 224, 231) made a point with respect to HSs that is equally valid to make regarding the RHSs: that they appear to exemplify what Stoker has labelled 'lottery by governance' (see above). Uncertainty, which is seen as producing improvisation, is as much the outcome as the process. In this way, government manages the tensions created by its programme of reform. In *both* RHSs, there is a line to the effect that one of the risks to the implementation of the strategy is precisely the uncertainty of the regional structures at the time they were written. The East of England's RHS sums up the situation thus: '[T]ensions stem from uncertainty over the roles for housing at the regional level until new arrangements can be confirmed' (EERA 2005: 19). In the South West, the RHS remarked that the 'transition to the new planning system [...] may also pose a risk to regional and local delivery' (SWRA 2005: 11). This uncertainty has the same source, the Barker Report, which will be examined below.

5.5.1 The Barker Report on Housing Supply

A clear indication of the growing Treasury dominance of the regional agenda, the economist Kate Barker was asked to review housing supply. This followed the 2003 Lambert report discussed in the previous, and also commissioned by the Treasury. The Barker Review set itself two aims. Firstly, to assess progress towards achieving the recommendations that the Review put forward, and, secondly, to provide an independent assessment of progress towards greater flexibility within the housing market – including ‘radical supply measures’ or measures to tackle demand (Barker 2004: 32).

The Review attempted to address a single problem: how to increase the supply of housing, and make the housing market more responsive, in order to achieve a lower trend in real terms in the growth of house prices than that at the time the Review was conducted (Barker 2004: 11). New houses account for only 10% of all transactions in the housing market, and only add – on average – 1% to the existing stock. In 2002, there were 134,000 houses that were new build of the 138,000. Meanwhile, the rate of household formation is on average 155,000 per year. The rate of increase in real prices, between 1971 and 2001, was 2.4%; however, between 1981 and 2001, the average increase was 2.7%. The EU average is 1.1%, requiring – for England – an extra 120,000 houses on top of existing planned increases (Barker 2004: 16, 20).

There were three further problems that were identified as being the possible outcome of low levels of housing supply. These were: constrained economic growth, as higher house prices could affect labour mobility and could also act as a disincentive for companies to invest within the UK; secondly, greater risk of macro-economic instability, as consumer spending is far more sensitive to house prices than in the rest of the EU: when house prices rise, consumers spend more; as prices fall, so consumers tend to spend less. Thirdly, affordability becomes increasingly more problematic if supply is restrained – it has been estimated that even with the then planned increases in housing supply of 20,000 per annum by Government, up to 5,000 households per annum will be priced out of the market by 2011 (Barker 2004: 12, 14, 17, 18, 21).

For these reasons, Government had made it clear that to do nothing ‘was not an option’ (Barker 2004: 21). In order, therefore, to achieve a ‘lower trend in real house prices’ (Barker 2004: 11), the Review concluded that more housing ‘may be needed’ (Barker 2004: 12), arguing as it does that this would lead to greater stability in the housing market which would in turn ‘bring important economic benefits to all’ (Barker 2004: 16).

The Review also stated some objectives for ‘a better functioning housing market’ (Barker 2004: 17), which include: a lower trend in real house price growth; ‘decent housing’ (undefined) available for those priced out of the market; better usage of existing stock, including a diminishing of housing as a role as an asset; fewer “bubbles”, which would lend itself to greater macroeconomic stability; and ensuring that ‘housing growth contributes to sustainable communities’, while the ‘most valuable land is preserved’ (Barker 2004: 17).

From the point of view of regions, a key recommendation that was made – and one that was accepted by Government – was that the Regional Housing Boards (RHB) should formerly merge with Regional Planning Bodies (RPB). This will bring/has brought together the responsibilities for allocating funding for social housing and renewal, as well as drawing up the RHSs that the RHBs have, and the allocation of housing and the drawing up of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) that the RPBs have (see below). It is expected that the merger in all regions will be completed by September 2006 (Barker 2004: 35-36; HM Treasury & ODPM 2005: 5, 59). As the recognised RPBs are invariably the Regional Assemblies (RA) themselves, this proposal is effectively a merger of the RHB with the RA (ODPM 2005a: 5).

The Government has also stated that it would set up an independent National Advice Unit (NAU) by autumn 2006. The NAU will advise the Government and the regions on the ‘implications of the Government’s overall ambitions on affordability for the level and broad distribution of future house building’ and will provide a ‘common methodology to inform regional levels of housing provision’ that will support the regions’ RSSs and other strategies (HM Treasury & ODPM 2005: 60).

The NAU was the Government’s answer to two other recommendations; a third recommendation that the Government should issue guidance regarding the composition

of Regional Planning and Housing Bodies elicited the response that a letter had already been sent from David Miliband, the Minister for Communities and Local Government. This requested information on how RAs will carry out their new planning roles, given the merger, and proposals as to how RAs should operate 'more generally', and more detailed guidance would be issued during the course 2006 'if appropriate' (HM Treasury & ODPM 2005: 61).

Strikingly, Barker did not seek the opinions of the regional assemblies, the designated Regional Housing Bodies. Housing is a particular issue in the recent past for the East and the new Barker projections for the East re-opened the debate. In October of 2004, EERA rejected a government 'suggestion' to consider 18,000 extra houses, although they accepted the original government proposal for 478,000 houses by 2021 (*The Guardian*, 16 October 2004). In 2004, questions were raised:

'[...] it [the RSS] was a jobs-led strategy, not a housing-led strategy [...] you don't provide thousands of houses and hope that someone's going to come and live in them; the jobs and the housing strategy go hand-in-hand. But also, the government has to provide the infrastructure for those jobs and those houses. It's not just roads; it's about public transport, rail; it's about all the other infrastructure issues: hospitals, universities, the environment: the list is endless'. (Interview B).

Initially, the government accepted this. However:

'They [the government] speak with forked tongues, sometimes [...] Now, they are saying something different. They've produced this housing projection which suggests that the East of England up to 2021 should be taking an additional nearer 100,000 homes, to 560,000 [...] bureaucrats in Whitehall who have looked at housing formation in the past few years and said, 'this is how many you want'. It comes back to some of the things that were in the Barker Report. She said we needed double the housing numbers. That was kicked into the long grass before the last election [2005], and we're now seeing it come out again [...] Of course, when Kate Barker did her report, she didn't consult with the East of England Planning Panel or the Regional Assembly; didn't consult with many

people – it's one of those failings that perhaps we're getting used to.' (Interview B).

This illustrates the centrally driven nature of housing, as well as the importance of placed by Barker, on regional housing numbers. It is also interesting to note that the RA was somewhat resigned to not being consulted, despite the fact that the Government has asked the Regional Assembly to produce the RSS.

As noted, housing in the East of England is a contentious issue. The South West is able to take a slightly more philosophical view:

'There is a top-down approach where we have, based on all the national evidence, regional housing strategies dealing with the shortage of affordable housing, inward migration and so on; and on that we base the figures for the region and sub-regions. The bottom-up approach is where we consult with local authorities about their view on how much they feel they can accommodate. And we try to marry that top-down, bottom-up approach [...] it is a two-way approach. It's not that we're driving from the top down; it's very much a consultation from the bottom as well.' (Interview A).

Perhaps because the South West does not have housing pressures to the same degree as the East of England, Barker did not have the impact that it did in the East:

'We tried to take an independent view; there's not been any pressure been put on us to arrive at a particular household number here. I would like to think of it as something that we have come up with from our own sources, if you like. What has been said, that the region was asked to look at, was to take the RPG figures, and to look at a two-point-five per cent increase, a ten per cent increase, and to look at what would be the affect of that. But that was a separate exercise to what we were doing in drawing up the spatial plan [...] The Barker Report, while we were conscious and aware of it, it was not something which was not dictating the way that we were progressing.' (Interview A).

The point of difference between the experiences of the East and the South West may be that Government had already identified the East of England as a region that perhaps should take more houses, and the Barker Report lent weight to their argument. The South West was more prepared to accept any extra housing, and did not see it as an issue. As one South West assembly member observed:

‘There’ve been more recent figures from the ODPM and what is called now ‘household projection’, which comes out with bigger figures and a different distribution’ (Interview D)

However, the South West is not challenging these figures, unlike in the East. Rather:

‘What the Regional Assembly is saying is that, and really it’s been based on what Government is saying as well, is that most development should go in the principal urban areas, because that’s where the jobs will be.’ (Interview D)

For the South West region, housing was not an issue simply because it appears that they were able to accommodate the larger numbers. Ultimately, however, it will be Government which decides on the final numbers – a figure that now has no upper limit:

‘Although we’ve got a target of five hundred and I-can’t-remember-how-many-thousand it is, that’s a minimum. Previous structural plans, we always had a target that had to be met, and providing it was met, we fulfilled our statutory obligations. Now, the number is a minimum. Government is saying that if other development proposals come forward that exceed the minimum, then you can go above the minimum.’ (Interview E).

Crucially, ‘This takes away local authorities rights to argue prematurity in terms of releasing new land or greenbelt [...] it changes the rules of the game.’ (Interview E).

However, there was one major shared concern for both the South West and the East of England concerning future development: money from the centre for infrastructure:

‘I think it’s the real worry that we have in the East of England, that the jobs will come, the housing will come, but the development, the infrastructure, the wider context will not appear. That includes monies for local authorities for all of their responsibilities.’ (Interview B)

‘One of the big problems for the whole of the South West, as well, is that we are very concerned that..., it’s all very well having all of this development, but you have to guarantee first from Government that the money to provide the infrastructure to go with it will be brought forward.’ (Interview D)

Crucially, it is the GOs – not the RAs – that have responsibility for making sure that the overall objectives of the Barker Review are delivered (HMT 2006b: 18), and it remains to see what the final housing figures will be for both the East of England (and the South West). This is not the only case where an RA in the East potentially may be sidelined: EERA may find itself sidelined over the issue of a second runway at Stansted Airport (see below).

In 2006, Kate Barker also published a review of land use planning, one that considered, amongst other things, the relationship between ‘development consent regimes’ and Regional Economic Strategies, and which will signal further reforms to the planning system (HMT 2006a: 71).

5.6 Planning

It is spatial planning generally, however, including housing and transport, that is one of the major policy areas at regional level, and one that now forms the bulk of the work of the Regional Assemblies. As an East of England member put it:

‘The regional planning panel is probably the most important one [of the Assembly]; we have the most responsibility. Most of our work is the result of getting a government grant, and that grant is to produce the regional spatial strategy. We also have lots of other responsibilities covering a wide area

concerning planning, transport across the region, and we've been consulted on such things as the airport strategy' (Interviewee B).

The Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs), with the Regional Economic Strategies discussed in the previous chapter, are the only statutory documents required of the regions.

The Devolving Decision Making Review (DDMR) made it clear that the government was interested in devolving 'responsibility for policy design' (HMT 2004b: 43) to the regions. In other words, after national government had formulated the policy, and set the targets, it would be up to the region to design a way of administering the policy and meeting the targets. The cited example was of the RDAs' RES. It is this idea, of devolved policy design rather than policy formulation, that characterises the RSS process.

Regional Planning Conferences, which produced Regional Planning Guidance (RPG), were already in place prior to the New Labour victory of 1997. Planning Policy Guidance note 11 (*Regional Planning*) suggested that Regional Chambers, as they were then frequently referred to, adopted the Conference role to become the designated Regional Planning Bodies (RPB), pre-empting future legislation. This future legislation came in 2004, when the first Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) were required to be drawn up (OPDM 2005a: 11).

Interestingly, it was reported in 2003 that the local Government members in one region (not named) refused to allow voting rights on planning issues to partner members on the Chamber. However, the Government made full voting rights a pre-condition for the significant levels of extra funding that the Chambers would receive as a result of acting as the RPB, and by April of 2003 all Chambers had become RPBs. Resources were also made available to the RAs in their new roles in the form of the Planning Delivery Grant, provided directly to the Assemblies themselves (OPDM 2005a: 11; ODPM 2005b: 28-29).

Nevertheless, this instance of a Chamber not allowing extending voting rights to social and economic partners does raise an issue with regard to their status as non-politically affiliated members. As one interviewee put it to me:

‘Political parties are represented on the Regional Assembly in exactly the same proportion as they are on all of the councils combined. And then you chuck in thirty per cent which aren’t divided up that way, but who are there because they are CPRE, CBI, whatever. Nobody says what are their politics, and do they really leave them outside the door? I know that a number of them in the past have been active county councillors, district councillors for particular political parties.’
(Interview D)

There does not seem to be an easy answer to the question this raises, and not one that the government appears to have addressed, but it is entirely possible that the reluctance of the (then) Chamber mentioned above to extend voting rights to its social and economic partners on planning issues may have been to preserve the political complexion of that particular region.

The underlying issue here is perhaps similar to the one of that an RA’s relationship with its respective GO. If an RA was fully elected, then the issue of the personal politics of the social and economic partners would not arise. Moreover, if fully elected, it might be that the GO would then be answerable not to Whitehall, but to the RA, radically changing the relationship, as has happened in Scotland with the Scottish Office:

‘If you had a directly elected assembly as you had in Scotland, then the Government Office could become answerable to an elected regional assembly [...] The Scottish Office is now answerable to the Scottish Executive, which has caused a major culture shock insofar as the civil servants are concerned; they have no linkages to Whitehall, hardly at all [...] One of the reasons why elected assemblies were rejected in the North East as I see it was that people recognised that it wouldn’t have any power’. (Interview E)

This supports the view that while there appears to have been change in the structures of governance within England, fundamentally, no such change has taken place; and that there is a clear model of how such a change could be brought about.

5.6.1 Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs)

The 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act introduced RSSs to the regions. These are to be drawn up by the Regional Assemblies, in consultation with stakeholders. The RSSs cover housing, and transport and mineral strategies. In this area, it was said of the late 90s planning regime and housing that: '[o]ne cannot escape a feeling ... that while the region may now carry more responsibility, it has little power to influence the cascade of numbers running from the national to the local level', (Cowell & Murdoch 1999: 666). It will be argued that, overall, this is still the case.

While the RSSs will replace the Regional Planning Guidances (RPGs), it is not a like-for-like replacement. The spatial strategies are broader, and cover environmental issues (such as biodiversity and air quality) and sustainable development. They include within them a regional minerals strategy and a regional transport strategy, and they are to inform 'the preparation of LDDs [Local Development Documents], Local Transport Plans (LTPs) and regional and sub-regional strategies and programmes that have a bearing on land use activities' by providing a 'spatial framework' (ODPM 2004: 1).

The Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) have now replaced the county and county-level structural plans. These LDFs likewise encompass a wider view than the previous structural plans, mirroring the planning changes at regional level. And will require not just approval from Government, but also from the Region:

'...they should submit that [the LDF] to Government for approval, and that should be in support of the regional spatial strategy [...] they would also have to meet the approval from the Regional Assembly, a sort of 'certificate of conformity'.' (interview B)

The former structural plans were themselves fairly similar to the new RSS, but obviously on a smaller scale:

'The structure plan was rather like a mini-regional spatial strategy; it would do virtually the same thing.' (interview A).

In that sense, the level of planning has been moved *up* a level. In particular, with regard to housing, where a search for an area on which to build new houses might be done at the county level as part of the structure plan, this is now part of the RSS process. The following comment reflects a movement both upwards from the local to the regional level and downwards from central government to the regional:

‘When it came down to it, at the end of the day, it was the minister in Whitehall who decided whether he liked the plan or not, and could dictate what you did with it. The difference now is that there is an in-between layer of the region. With a bit of luck, in the future, it will be regional decision rather than a national decision.’ (Interview D).

On the face of it, this would seem to indicate a shift in power upwards to the regional level at the expense of (county-level) local authorities below them, at least, insofar as spatial planning is concerned; although, of course, housing numbers and the final decision to accept the plan are still decided on at national level, as the last comment underlines. Arguments about housing numbers that took place between county and national government still take place, but they are now between the Regional Assembly and Government, as the East of England’s experience in particular shows.

Within the context of the RSS process, *where* in the regions houses should go, is discussed at regional level by the sub-regions and counties – it forms part of the ‘bottom-up’ approach alluded to above. Gloucestershire, for example, was able to maintain the same number of planned houses as had been allocated under the former planning regime and RPG10:

‘Gloucestershire is getting away lightly compared with the rest of the region – the rest of the region is getting on for RPG10 plus twenty-five per cent. And that has come out of the arguments that have been put forward by the county, by the proposals put forward by the officers of the Regional Assembly, and by what other people in the region have been asking for – Plymouth wanted a lot of development, for example – and constraints, and so on.’ (Interview D)

The prominence of the Government Offices in the RSS process is clear. At the meetings of the Assembly committees to draw up the strategies, usually two members of the GO will attend. And as the Government Office of the South West's website makes clear (gos.co.uk/gosw; accessed 10 Mar 2006), it will 'work with regional partners to develop, implement and monitor "Regional Spatial Strategies,"'. It goes on: '[T]his office acts on behalf of the Secretary of State. We have to make sure that the new Regional Spatial Strategy takes proper account of issues that are likely to affect this region, and reflects the Government's national planning policies'.

One can argue, then, that if the GOs are acting on the behalf of the Secretary of State, then it suggests that it is central government, and not the region, that decides if 'proper account' has been taken of regional issues. Moreover, it is the Secretary of State that has to 'sign off' and publish the final RSS – not any regional body.

Clearly, this process fits the 'decentralisation of design' that was outlined in the 2004 DDMR. An examination of the draft RSSs demonstrate the degree to which they are prescribed.

An Examination in Publication (EiP) follows a three month consultation after the publication of the draft RSS. This recommends any changes to the Secretary of State. Following any proposed changes by the Secretary of State, there is another consultation of between two and three months. Points during this process deserve elaboration.

One of the key features is consultation with 'stakeholders: other actors are invited to contribute to the spatial strategy consultations prior to the publishing of the draft RSSs and in two consultation periods following the drafts. In the case of the South West, there were joint RSS and RES events, as the RES was being rewritten at the time, something that the government encourages in PPS11. In the case of the South West, it was put this way:

'Because the RDA were also revising their economic strategy [...] in the autumn of last year [2005], so we and the RDA had joint presentations and events around the region; they were fairly joined up' (Interview A).

The list of just over thirty “regional partners” and “stakeholders” in the South West – the terms appear to be synonymous (cf. SWRA 2004: 4 and SWRA 2004: 17) – includes local authorities, and mostly organisations to do with tourism, water and housing (for example South West Water, Wessx Water, Somerset Tourism, Visit Cornwall, Midas Homes Ltd, and Somer Housing Group). In the East of England, the list is longer, but appears to include more government agencies, such as the Environment Agency, the Highways Agency, the Health Development Agency, the Countryside Agency, the Strategic Rail Authority and others, along with the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the Confederation of British Industry (EERA 2004; SWRA 2006).

Publication of the East of England’s RSS – the East of England Plan – has slipped by about six months. The date proposed in the December 2004 published draft suggested December 2006 for final publication (EERA 2004: 4). Currently, the expectation is now that it will be published in the ‘summer of 2007’ (RSS Review Timetable, EERA web site). The South West, meanwhile, is looking at a 2008 publication date. Its draft RSS was published in June 2006.

The RSS drafting procedure is closely prescribed to begin with. Planning Policy Guidance note 11 (*Regional Planning*) (PPS 11) sets out the preliminary guidance from central government – a ‘note’ that runs to over one hundred pages. It specified over one hundred policy documents that had to be considered in the preparation of the RSSs. Three of these are from the EU; the others are central government policy documents. Indeed, the East of England’s draft RSS states that the role of the draft is ‘to provide guidance on how and where national policies apply in the East of England and to include only policies that are regionally or sub-regionally specific.’ (EERA 2004: 8).

One of the consequences of this is that the draft RSSs of the South West and the East of England follow a very similar format over ten or so chapters: an introduction to the region; a chapter setting the context of the RSS; chapters detailing sub-regional strategies, housing numbers, regional transport; other chapters detailing culture, the environment and economic development.

The main government policy behind the RSS appears to be Sustainable Communities Plan (SCP). PPS 11 states that:

‘The main principles of the new arrangements are to *deliver* policy better at the regional level and contribute to the culture change necessary to deliver the Government’s Sustainable Communities Plan’ (ODPM 2004: 1; my emphasis).

It seems that the original intention through the RSS was policy delivery in general, and the SCP in particular. The East of England reflected this, when it said that: ‘[t]he Government’s Sustainable Communities Plan has been a key influence on this draft RSS’ (EERA 2004: 8).

An important stage in the RSS is the Examination in Public (EiP). The East of England published the report of their EiP in June 2006; the South West expects to hold their EiP in the spring of 2007. The EiP is organised, not by the region, but by an independent panel appointed by the Secretary of State (for Communities and Local Government). The panel will invite participants as necessary. The EiP is then followed by the publication of proposed changes by the Secretary of State, based on the report of the EiP, and which in turn are subject to an eight to twelve week consultation period for the region to respond. (It is at this stage which is where the East of England finds itself.) One could make the case, then, that through the EiP the regions lose a degree of control or ownership of the process: it is the region that has to respond to the proposed changes to the draft RSS put forward by the Secretary of State.

The East of England’s 2006 EiP, conducted by Alan Richardson and Roy Foster, highlighted as a ‘major part of the context of the RSS, and of the agenda of EiP’ two ‘key streams of policy from the national level’: firstly the SCP, which includes housing needs and the Barker report; the Growth Areas and the ‘drive for a step change in housing output’ (Richardson & Foster 2006: 16). Secondly, the ‘UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS)’ which includes, one, an ‘integrated approach to sustainable development’; two, ‘environmental limits’, and three, the ‘climate change imperative’ (Richardson & Foster 2006: 17),

What this makes clear is the extent to which the process is dominated by central government, either through policies that the RSSs have to acknowledge, or by the process itself, whether through the oversight of the GOs or by the EiP.

The RSS process, through its consultations and stakeholder participation, represents a clear example of new way of governing, but, and in concurring with Kooiman's views of the state, there has not been any change within the nature of the state: this is still, in the final analysis, hierarchical governance. The hierarchical nature of this was put very bluntly by one interviewee:

‘Our [Hertfordshire County Council’s] fundamental disagreement was the scale of development in Hertfordshire that was being imposed on us effectively by the government through the Regional Assembly [...] All of these regional plans are Treasury driven; we had a number of meetings with ministers, and they made it absolutely clear that if a Regional Assembly came up with plans to build in areas where the Treasury didn’t think it was a good idea, they would veto it [...] I can’t emphasis too strongly how much the Treasury controls all of this.’ (Interview E).

This is a clear indication of the influence of the Treasury, one which has grown since the turn of the twenty-first century, as was remarked upon in Chapter Two.

5.6.2 Transport

The English regions also have to devise a Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), which forms part of the RSS. There is, on the face of it, one striking difference between the South West and the East of England with regard to transport. As noted above, in the South West, there is a regional transport forum, whose Chair sits on the RA as one of the “social, environmental and economic partners” (SEEPs). No such body as yet exists in the East of England, and consequently there is no EERA member acting as a single transport representative. In terms of the RTS, reflecting on the differences of outcomes may therefore provide an insight that will help to answer the question of regional autonomy and difference, namely, to what extent are regions developing their own approaches to perceived problems?

The question is, then, did having a Transport Forum produce a noticeably different outcome on the respective RTSs?

The East of England's RTS identified six broad objectives - firstly, to improve access to jobs, services, leisure and tourist facilities; secondly, to enable infrastructure programmes and transport service of both existing and proposed economic regeneration; thirdly, to reduce the overall need to travel; fourthly, to reduce the 'transport intensities' of economic activity; fifthly, to minimise the impact of travel on the environment; and finally, to improve both the safety and - curiously - the *security* of transport (EERA 2005: 133).

A number of the policies regarding the environment and safety are merely a regional take on national guidance that has already been adopted in local transport plans: '[T]he task of the RTS is to interpret the implications [...] at the regional level' (EERA 2005: 149). This reveals the degree of emphasis given to the regional level.

Sixteen 'Regional Interchange Centres' have been identified by EERA, places that share at least some if not all of the characteristics of access to mainline railway, major bus hubs, or significant coach links or an airport (EERA 2005: 135). There are commitments in the East's RTS to the ports and airports about access, particularly by rail and bus/coach, contributing to regional and national objectives regarding economic growth, regeneration and sustainable transport (EERA 2005: 138; 140).

Inevitably, the above commitment will go some way to enhancing what has been identified as the 'strategic network', a set of routes that experience 'major movement patterns', and includes both rail and road. In particular, these are connections to London, ports and airports, as well as to other regions. Interestingly, the 'network broadly reflects the priorities in surrounding regions' - the concerns of the East Midlands regarding links to Felixstowe and Harwich in particular are identified (EERA 2005: 143). Areas of weakness in previous studies had already been identified, and now appear as areas for improvement within the RTS. For example, rail service provision between Norwich and Stansted 'should also be achieved' (EERA 2005: 144), although this - as

with other examples - lack the detail describing how this will be actually be brought about, and give the strategic, almost aspirational, flavour of the RTS.

Although in the South West the terminology is different - here, the more general term 'strategically significant cities and towns' (SSCTs) is preferred - there are similar objectives relating to the reduction of travel overall, and in particular to reduce travel by car; to improve rail links; to improve access to airports and ports; and so on, as well as a similar thematic format - roughly: roads, rail, airports, ports, buses/coaches and parking. Furthermore, connections to London and the South East are seen as vital, with it being noted that: '[M]uch of the region lies beyond the two hour rail journey time to London which is characteristic of locations having the best economic prospects' (SWRA 2004: 101). Transport links are seen as vital for attracting inward investment: however, If nothing else, it does appear to underline the importance of London to the economy of the South West.

One area of difference is with regard to car parking policy. The South West RTS simply notes that it would not be desirable to have a uniform parking standard across the region (SWRA 2005: 111). The East of England, however, does this, although only to the extent of recycling the old Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 13 maximum standards. These standards relate to the type of building and size. For example, a cinema that occupies an area of one square kilometre or more should at the most allow for one space per five seats. Meanwhile, a hospital above two and a half square kilometres should as a maximum provide one space per four staff and one space per three day visitors (EERA 2004: 155).

However, there the recommendation is that, as public transport accessibility increases to the level aspired to in the RTS, the maximum standards should be brought down to 70% of this PPG 13 standard (EERA 2004: 155).

Other regional differences arise purely from geography. The South West has a significant length of coastline, for example, with ports in the South West handling 20 million tonnes of freight during 2003; Bristol handled 11 million tonnes during 2004 alone (SWRA 2005: 105).

Likewise, the peninsula character of the South West also has an impact, particularly in the far south west. Here, it is suggested that future economic development in 'the medium to longer term' rely on 'indigenous and self sustaining growth', with businesses using electronic communications (SWRA 2005: 102). Apart from using the internet, it is not entirely clear how this will provide a solution to the transport problems of the far south west.

The point of both RTSs, overall, is to encourage a 'multi-modal' shift away from relying on roads for freight and travel, while also highlighting proposals for future Government funding and investment. The differences here amount to the South West incorporating their proposed schemes throughout the RTS, while the East prefers to add as an appendix their schemes. Moreover, while the East was able to point to a 'strategic network' that involved both road and rail, in the South West, the phrase was a 'strategic road network' (SWRA 2005: 103).

As an addendum to the above comments on the East of England's RTS, the Examination in Public (EiP), pointed out that, despite the crucial role that buses were going to play in the delivery of the RTS objectives, it was not possible to secure representation from the bus industry - something the South West was able to do, however indirectly, through Travel Watch (East of England EiP 2006: 135).

More generally, the EiP report noted that the RTS has to conform to the national highways programme, and that 'it is unclear what influence, if any, RTS can have on establishing, or altering, priorities for that programme.' Moreover, where 'regional and national priorities differ, the outcome is *at best* uncertain' (East of England EiP 2006: 135; my emphasis).

This is something that is reflected in the proposals for the Stansted Airport expansion, as well as the national house building programme, and this serves as a case in point. To begin with, there is a disagreement the RA and RDA. The East of England's RES (written by the RDA) welcomes the planned expansion and second runway at Stansted Airport in Essex; meanwhile, EERA is opposed to a second runway (EERA 2004: 120). In the December 2003 White Paper, *The Future of Air Transport*, the government made clear its commitment to a second runway at Stansted Airport by 2012 (DfT 2003). The

episode throws into question what influence the Regional Assembly has – the second runway at Stansted is Government policy, and it will be for Uttlesford District Council to either refuse or grant permission; not the Assembly. Indeed, it was Uttlesford District Council who on 30 November 2006 refused planning permission for the expansion of the existing facilities. Following an appeal, by the British Airports Authority (BAA), this will now go to a public inquiry, the result of which will be known in early 2008 (BBC News Online, 19 Oct 2007). Planning permission for the second runway is not due to be sought until late 2007, early 2008. This is likely to be contentious, given the very active Stop Stansted Expansion (SSE) campaign group, which claims the active support of well over 6,000 members.¹⁰

The Assembly would appear to be sidelined in this particular dispute, yet the airport is clearly a major regional asset, and the future of the airport has implications for both the region's environmental and economic prospects:

‘The government has decided as a national policy it wants to expand airports, the Regional Assembly in terms of Stansted are not going to support a second runway, all of the local authorities around are not supporting a second runway.’

The importance of this issue is that it is one of only two examples where there was a significant disagreement between an RA and the government – the other example also involving EERA, over housing numbers. The South West followed national government policy with regard to airport expansion, for example (SWRA 2006: 107-108).

What this overview of transport policy area at regional level shows, then, is that key decisions are not made at regional level; it follows what should now be a clear pattern of something between central government ‘steering’ and ‘control’ over core regional-level policy areas.

¹⁰ From the Stop Stansted Expansion web site, at <http://www.stopstanstedexpansion.com>

5.7 Conclusions

This chapter has looked at the changing nature of governance and ideas relating to metagovernance; the ‘hollow state thesis’; and the ‘asymmetrical power model’. It then went on to examine the GO and RAs and the key policy areas at the regional level outside of economic governance: namely, spatial planning and housing, using the East of England and South West regions as examples.

It was shown that in cases of housing and planning, central government remains the dominant actor within the regions. Moreover, while the GOs are sometimes seen as representing the region to Whitehall, it is clear that, from the point of view of central government at least, they are regional offices of central government.

The discussion on the RTSs showed that, even though there the South West’s transport forum has a member on SWRA, the impact on the transport strategy that this brought is minimal. This suggests that the influence of national government makes an otherwise striking difference negligible, and indicates the extent to which regions are in fact “allowed” to diverge.

The Barker review into housing supply is an interesting case in point, as it shows the degree to which regional institutions “matter” to Whitehall. Although the Regional Assemblies are the bodies that principally deal with planning and housing, Barker did not see fit to consult any Regional Assembly. It was her figures that have subsequently been adopted by national government.

The state appears to have merely changed the way in which it governs, as suggested by both Kooiman and the asymmetrical power model. The state may well be experiencing a ‘hollowing out’, but following MacLeod and Goodwin (1999), the argument is that this may well be a ‘hollowing out’ of state *form* rather than state *power*. It certainly would have to acknowledge, in any case, the way in which national policy can ‘overdetermine’ those that act at the regional level (MacLeod and Goodwin 1999: 514).

One can clearly see that to a certain extent governance is being re-scaled or re-territorialised, as we saw in the previous chapter with economic governance. The limits to this is demonstrated in the matters of what national government decides is important for it to take an interest in – housing highlights; airport expansion is clearly another area that will continue to impact upon the East of England in particular.

One of the consequences of this, however, is to create regional actors. A finding to emerge reinforces a finding from Chapter Three – that is the way that individual actors are identifying with the region, and are able to think in regional terms. This is particularly true of the social and economic partners – perhaps because they are not answerable to a local electorate and do not have a local “patch” to defend in negotiations over, say, housing numbers. In this way, we’re seeing the emergence of “regional elites”, one specifically prompted by regionalisation.

These regional actors, however, are not completely new actors. As the case of the faith forums and the transport forum in the South West show, there were existing bodies – regional actors came from the way these bodies responded to regionalisation. An Assembly’s prompting could be decisive, however, as is shown in the case of transport forums, or the speed with which a regional forum may be established, in the case of the faith forums examined.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The English Regions: A Necessary Myth?

At the outset of this thesis, I identified three main themes. These had to do with territory and identity; Europeanisation and the New Labour's governance agenda. It was within that context that I set out to answer the overall question of regionalisation in England. This was further broken down into three questions, the first of which had to do with Europeanisation: to what extent was Europeanisation responsible for the regionalisation of England? The second asked if New Regionalism accounted for the emergence of English regions. Finally, the wider question of whether the emergence of "governance" was also responsible for bringing a regional tier into being.

Chapter 1 demonstrated that the English regions are an artificial creation. They have been designed to meet various policy needs, notably relating to economic development and spatial planning. The history of regions in England does have a significant history that dates from the end of the First World War, and a key issue since then has to do with where to draw the boundaries of the regions.

Although in parts of England may indeed be something close to "regional identities" – examples include the North, Cornwall and perhaps East Anglia – they appear to be either in an area too large or too small from the point of view central government, which has since the Second World War preferred to use its own regional boundaries to cover all of England. The fact that they have been able to is in large part recognition of the fact that England has traditionally lacked strong regional identities that have characterised other countries, such as Spain, as well as the need for an administrative tier between the local and the national. Moreover, New Labour's commitment to Scottish and Welsh devolution – a legacy from the pre-Blair Labour Party – also made it necessary for there to be some form of reassurance for northern-based MPs.

These are the roots of English regionalisation. However, there were two other discernible “agendas” associated particularly with elements within New Labour, and which highlighted the role of the English region in its own right. The first of these was described as the “Treasury agenda”, and which has (as perhaps one would expect) an economic focus. This contrasted with the “ODPM agenda”, which had to do with planning and housing in particular and specifically refers to the nine years (1997-2006) in which John Prescott was responsible for what is now the Department of Local Government and Communities.

We shall come back to consider these elements. A third element which has been given prominence by some scholars as being in some way “responsible” for the emergence of regions within Europe has been the EU. Chapter 2 explored the question of Europeanisation in some depth. EU structural funds, the funds of EU regional policy, in particular have been identified by some scholars as having a significant role in affecting Europeanisation within Member States. One of the effects of Europeanisation, it has been suggested, is the necessity for a regional tier of governance, which has to be created if it does not already exist. Others, such as Sandford (2005), have rejected outright the suggestion that the EU has any influence at all on the institutions that emerged within the English regions: ‘There is no evidence’, he says, ‘to back up the suggestion from some quarters that regionalisation has its roots in European Union policy’ (Sandford 2005: 7). On this view, any pressure from the EU is simply one of a number of pressures exerted upon regions in terms of administration. It does not dictate the form of any response to that pressure, or the wider roles of any institutions of governance.

To begin with, it was noted that there is an ambiguity in the way in which the word “region” was employed. For example, in Bache (2004), the evidence for Europeanisation was in fact from the local authorities, such as Birmingham City Council, rather than *regional* authorities as we now understand them to be in England. EU regional policy tends to have a greater effect on England local authorities than the regional institutions.

Moreover, the evidence I have collected tends to support the view overall that Europeanisation and structural funding had only a limited impact on the development of an English regional level. In particular, it demonstrated that the level of structural

funding a region receives does not appear to indicate the level of “European” response. The East of England, which was not in receipt of Objective One funding during the 2000-2006 funding period, was shown to be far more proactive in its engagement with the EU than the South West. Of particular significance in the respect was that the East of England Regional Assembly has a panel dedicated to European and International affairs, as well as a written strategy to inform the actions of the Assembly, neither of which can be found in the South West.

An intriguing, tentative, finding also emerged at this point. This was that despite the artificial nature of the East of England region, there appeared to be emerging regional actors who were identifying with this new region and attempting to seize opportunities in the gaps immediately outside of national government control, and the emergence of a group of what might be called “regional elites”. Although more research is needed to establish how far a “regional identity” has indeed been created, this is a finding that emerges in a different context, and one to which we shall return. Nevertheless, it is potentially indicative of the way in which institutions are created and around which identities may be forged.

Chapter 4 examined the question of New Regionalism: was there any evidence that the emergence of the regions could be associated with this apparent trend? This examined what became at the turn of the twenty-first century the “Treasury agenda” aspect of New Labour’s regionalisation program. The evidence was clear. New Labour has certainly pursued what amounts to a New Regionalist approach; their economic policy as far as the English regions are concerned has been heavily influenced in particular by the work of Porter and his thinking on clusters. The RDAs were at the heart of New Labour’s policies for the regions in a way that the Assemblies were not – it took five years and a second term of office before New Labour put forward its proposals for elected Assemblies. However, there was a key point of divergence. For all the New Regionalist-sounding rhetoric with regard to decentralisation, the economic policy with regard to the regions remained tightly controlled by the centre. The roles of the RDAs are carefully circumscribed by Government, in terms of targets to meet, indicators for performance and heavily prescriptive guidance on what should be included in their RESs. In short, this was a national economic policy that is delivered at regional level. Whereas the New

Regionalist inspired rhetoric was of regional autonomy, the English experience in the regions is different.

Nevertheless, one of the major impetuses for New Regionalism is a response to globalisation. New Labour's, and in particular the Treasury's, concerns at the regional level with skills, business support, competitiveness, productivity and "supply side" architecture (notably the RDAs) represents both New Regionalist ideas as well as a neo-liberal economic approach (see also Sandford 2005: 31). It is from a neo-liberal perspective that local (and regional) autonomy means 'adopting a competitive approach' (Loughlin 2008: 397).

The ideas surrounding the re-scaling and re-territorialisation of economic governance was also examined. One of the strengths of this approach is the understanding of the state's continued role in economic governance. The RDAs, for all of the New Regionalist rhetoric surrounding them, represent a re-scaling of economic governance by the state – but not a diminishing of state authority. Indeed, the evidence adduced supports the view of MacLeod (2001). The state is engaged in 'creative restructuring of political economic flows' as far as England is concerned, and that all its 'properties' are involved in the establishing of regional institutional thicknesses (MacLeod 2001: 815).

The question arises of the relationship between the regional institutions and central government and the changes in governance. With respect to this, the fifth chapter looked at the role of the Regional Assemblies, which are at the forefront to what was referred to as the "ODPM agenda". Their central role is to develop a Regional Spatial Strategy, and the area in which they exert the most influence is therefore in the areas of housing, planning and transport. The RAs had very little influence overall. Major decisions that will affect the region, such as airport expansion, are still taken at local level in the first place, or in the event of an appeal, at national level.

From the point of view of the English regions, the state remains in control of the key elements with respect to the RAs – it provides most of the resources; it sets out the form of the institution; it issues prescriptive advice on the major policy area (spatial planning) in which the RAs work and therefore effectively shapes the overall policy, including the

setting of targets; and, finally, the state retains the ultimate power of veto as it is the Secretary of State that has to approve the planning strategy developed by the RAs.

The RAs are at the centre of a number of networks, but these are not “self-organising”. Rather they are dependent on central government – a finding also to be found in Sandford (2005). Sandford (2005) and Marsh, Richards and Smith (2003) both highlight the way in which this goes beyond New Labour and the way it makes policy. Rather, it ‘has important affinities and continuities with the historical structures of the British state (Sandford 2005: 84), which is particularly stronger in England. The evidence from the regions presented in the fifth chapter in particular would seem to give some credence to the “asymmetrical power model” put forward by Marsh, Richards and Smith (2003). The view is that power is not shared equally amongst the members of a policy network, but rather retained by Whitehall. For them, the changes in governance brought about by New Labour are to improve *delivery*, rather than democracy (Marsh *et al*, 2003: 216). This questions the suggestion put forward by Rhodes (1997) that the “Westminster system” has been replaced by a fragmented, hollowed out state’ (Sandford 2005: 85). As Sandford (2005: 86) argues, it is ‘highly counter-cultural’ for a UK government to establish institutions to which it will devolve power and ‘not interfere’.

It is more accurate to say that there has been a ‘hollowing-out of state form and a hollowing-out of state power’ (MacLeod & Goodwin 1999: 522). This, it is suggested, is a crucial distinction, and is reminiscent of the distinction Kooiman makes between the *nature* of governance as having changed, rather than the nature of the state (Kooiman 2003: 116, 130).

Nevertheless, *regional* actors, as opposed to local actors, have emerged, actors who are able to identify with the region as a whole. Within the Assembly, these actors were in particular the co-opted members, the so-called “social, economic and environmental partners”. They were able to take a regional view on planning matters, and that the local authority members were often concerned with their local areas. The RA was for them a forum in which they had to limit the number of houses, for example, that they had to cater for. The co-opted members were able to take a more, perhaps pragmatic, regional view on such decisions, probably because they were not accountable to a local electorate who could turn them out in the next election.

This recalls a finding in the earlier chapter on Europeanisation. Here it was found that, with respect to Europe, the RA collectively in the East of England at least was taking a regional view and ready to identify with this new regional space. Moreover, it was proactive in this “European” policy area, and keen to raise its profile beyond Europe as well, by seeking partnerships with other regions.

Although clearly an area for further research, the tentative finding must be that there does appear to be an emerging “regional elite” who do identify with this region.

The English regions represent a change in the governance of England, but perhaps not in the way in which it first appears. It was not, for example, a “bottom-up regionalism” to which central government is responding. Rather, central government has effectively created the English regions, ones that cut across a number of policy areas of its choosing (hence, policing and education are not dealt with at a regional level) and to a degree of its own choosing: the importance of housing or economics over other policies, such as the environment for example reflects the priorities of central government rather than the regions.

In this respect, the regions may be seen as a “necessary myth”, as pointed out in the Introduction. The English regions in their current form are essentially the creation of national policy, and thus existed, initially at least, in the mind of policy-makers. Globalisation has also been described as a “necessary myth” (indeed, it is from this context that I have borrowed the term), one born of a neo-liberal economic approach that sees global market forces as a force in the world that cannot be tamed (Hirst & Thompson 1999: 1-18). Both New Regionalism and the emergence of governance are seen by scholars as responses to this particular “necessary myth”, so it is perhaps fitting to view the English regions equally as a “necessary myth”.

6.2 The Future of Regionalisation and the English Regions

The victory for the “no” campaign in the 2004 North East referendum appears to have dealt the regionalisation project a blow from which it is unlikely to recover for the

foreseeable future; and John Prescott's exit from government has seen the regions – Regional Assemblies in particular – also means that the regions have lost their biggest champion. That is not to say that the English regions are entirely without their champions, however. The MPs Ed Balls and John Healy made a strong case for regional governance in 2006 for example, in their *Evolution and Devolution in England*, arguing that strong regional governance benefits towns and cities. This was more a response to the growing tendency within Government to think more in terms of the “city-region” rather than the “region”, however.

Over a year after the 2004 referendum defeat in the North East, and the postponement of the referenda in the North West and Yorkshire and Humberside, the House of Commons Committee that scrutinised the work of the ODPM (and now the Department for Communities and Local Government) launched an inquiry into the future of the regional governance in England. It was concerned that the ‘new direction of the Government’s regional policy was still not readily apparent’ (CLGC 2007: 4).

The final Report (*Is there a Future for Regional Government?*) was published in March 2007, and reflected a growing interest in city-regions. The Communities and Local Government Committee in the report stated their belief that the case for city-regions by Government was ‘compelling’, and that it represented a ‘credible alternative to the current arrangements’ (CLGC 2007: 64, 68). It further acknowledged that this would require a change of role for the RDAs, and remarked that, in that respect, the contribution of Ed Balls and John Healey mentioned above was ‘disappointing’ (CLGC 2007: 65).

The renewed emphasis on the local level had been signalled over a year before by David Miliband, Alan Milburn and Gordon Brown in articles in *The Guardian* newspaper¹¹ on what Miliband then called “double devolution” – a devolution of power from central government to local government, and a devolution of power from local government to either the neighbourhood or to the individual. This approach, along with emphasis on “city-region” in the Government’s March 2006 *State of the English Cities* report, suggested a movement *away* from the region in government thinking following the loss

¹¹ *The Guardian* 21 Feb 2006: ‘More power to the people’; *The Guardian* 21 Feb 2006: ‘We can’t let the right be the voice of the “me” generation’; *The Guardian* 27 Feb 2006, ‘We have renewed Britain; now we must champion it’

of the referendum in the North East. Indeed, in a television interview at the time, David Miliband (then Cabinet Minister for Local Government and Communities) was asked directly if this emerging city-region agenda was a next step following the defeat of the 'original vision' for the regions. He responded:

'There is no question it was defeated, that's a simple statement of fact. The people of the North East were absolutely clear that they didn't want a regional tier of government.' (BBC Sunday AM, 5 March 2006).¹²

There was no further elaboration, and no suggestion, for example, that while the North East had rejected a fully elected Regional Assembly, the North West or Yorkshire and Humberside might be allowed to decide in a referendum to vote in favour of one: the North East defeat has apparently ended the process of further regionalisation and further opportunities for referenda. One is tempted to say that a national policy was defeated in that referendum, rather than a regional aspiration.

Nevertheless, this "city-region" agenda represents the re-emergence of the "other side" of New Labour, the side that included some within Downing Street and Peter Mandelson who preferred city-regions. Tony Blair himself preferred locally elected mayors to elected regional assemblies (Stoker 2002: 428). As Flinders (in Ludlam & Smith (eds) 2004: 136) pointed out, there had always been a tension between two different types of regional model: the regions and the idea of elected mayors for county cities, such as Liverpool, Leeds and Manchester.

This also formed the background to the re-adjustments to the Government Office structure. Again, "double devolution" was cited. The Government's 2006 *Review of Government Offices* emphasised a new, local area-based focus for GOs, as opposed to a *regional* focus. As part of the new strategic objectives Government has set for GOs, they are to work with local authorities to help 'secure a double devolution' (HMT 2006b: 2), reflecting a more 'strategic engagement between central government and local government' (HMT 2006b: 25). They will be closely involved with the development of the Local Authority Agreements (LAAs), especially as most grant administration work

¹² Broadcast on BBC One, the interview transcript can be found online at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/sunday_am/4775814.stm

will naturally come to an end by 2008 (HMT 2006b: 2, 25). This has an echo in the reforms announced to the RDAs in 2007, where responsibility for funding is to be delegated by RDAs to sub-regions and local authorities wherever possible (HMT, DEBRR & CLG 2007: 81).

More significantly, it was also announced during 2007 that Regional Assemblies will cease to exist after 2010; at least, in their current form (BBC News Online, 17 July 2007). This announcement followed the publication of the *Review of Sub-national Economic Development and Regeneration*. It is an interesting announcement in the light of an earlier comment by Sandford (2005: 230), who claimed that ‘it would not be possible for a future government’ to abolish RAs.

One might say that this represents the dominance of what I have been calling the “Treasury agenda”, which was never interested in Assemblies and democracy as such. With Gordon Brown now Prime Minister, and the effective abolition in 2006 of the ODPM, this agenda is now arguably the only one that New Labour has.

The government claims that the RDAs do not have a clear ‘accountability framework’. While the Regional Assemblies offer varying degrees of scrutiny, the RDAs are also accountable to Ministers (HMT, DEBRR & CLG 2007: 55). Critically, however, the Regional Assemblies’ Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) and the RDAs’ Regional Economic Strategies (RES) suffered from ‘misalignment’, and that these ‘institutional arrangements’ were in part to blame (HMT, DEBRR & CLG 2007: 92).

Indeed, such a “misalignment” between an RSS and an RES was detailed in chapter 5 with respect to the East of England, where it was noted that both the expansion of Stansted and the building of a second runway were supported by the East of England’s RDA, but not by the Regional Assembly.

One possible solution to this “misalignment” was in fact contained in the 2006 Report of the Communities and Local Government Committee (CLGC), *Is there a Future for Regional Government?* This suggested the strengthening of oversight by giving more formal powers to the RAs as a way of improving scrutiny of the RDAs (CLGC 2006: 68). It appears that Government has thought that ending them would be easier, however.

It appears that ‘this poor alignment may particularly impede the effectiveness in practice of the RES’ (HMT, DEBRR & CLG 2007: 92), and the fact that the RSS is a statutory plan once agreed by the Secretary of State was cited as the reason that it has ‘more influence on the activities of regional and local delivery partners’ (HMT, DEBRR & CLG 2007: 92). Why this was necessarily a bad thing was not made clear. But the latter point is revealing because it shows clearly the government’s view that the RES is of more importance; indeed, elsewhere, the complaint was that local authorities were paying too much attention to service delivery at the expense of economic development when writing their Local Area Agreements (LAAs), apparently because they ‘do not perceive benefits from growth’ (HMT, DEBRR & CLG 2007: 56).

It was also argued in the Review that ‘constrained housing supply’ was a problem hindering economic growth (HMT, DEBRR & CLG 2007: 56). We saw (again in chapter 5) that the East of England Regional Assembly actively opposed the numbers of houses that Government wanted to be built in the region. However, with housing transferred over to the RDAs, and better “aligned” with the strategic economic priorities for this region, it would seem that the government are hoping that such a conflict will not occur.

Meanwhile, it would not be too cynical to suggest that the planning White Paper’s proposed independent commission for planning for “nationally significant” applications relating to transport, water, wastewater, waste and energy infrastructure will mean that significant opposition from both local and regional authorities will effectively be neutralised – an important factor as far as the expected planning application for the second runway at “London’s third airport” in Stansted is concerned.

Two trends can be discerned, then. On the one hand, there is the renewed emphasis on city-regions, and turning away from the region, as the focus of government policy, following the defeat for the government in the North East.

The second is a clear and unambiguous fashioning of the regional level by New Labour to better serve its economic agenda and a strengthening of the state in England where just a few years ago there appeared to some to be a weakening. This new regional level, with its slimmed down Government Offices, re-focussed on the local level, and its reformed

RDAs with their newly acquired planning functions, will appear different from the regions as they existed for the first few years of the twenty-first century. But the new focus on the RDAs, rather than the Assemblies, points clearly to an economic agenda, and the re-scaling of economic governance, rather than to, say, a democratic one where power is devolved to elected regional assemblies.

This is not a case of *regionalism*, of central government responding to regional demands, one where the authority of the central state is being challenged in some way. Rather, this is a continuation of a policy of *regionalisation*, directed firmly from the centre. It is a policy mostly associated with Labour, “old” and “New”, and as such it remains to be seen whether the RDAs will survive a change in Government. One possibility is that the UK state has been strengthened in England as an unintended consequence of devolution to Scotland and Wales, which we saw was linked to the establishment of the RDAs – an area for future research, perhaps. Either way, the ‘tentative first step’ towards change in the governance of England which Sandford (2005: 239) alluded to has given way to a purposeful stride towards retrenchment by the state.

Appendix A

The following are the core questions asked in the semi-structured interviews with Regional Assembly (RA) members:

Non-LA members:

What were the circumstances under which your organisation came into existence?

How did your organisation come to be represented on the Regional Assembly?

LA and Non-LA members

How would you describe the RA's relationship with the Government Office?

How would you describe the RA's relationship with the RDA?

In your experience, are RA members able to take a regional view, or do local interests dominate?

What did you want to see in the Regional Spatial Strategy?

How successful do you feel you were in achieving your objectives?

What were the problems you encountered?

Has being involved in the RA changed your views about the desirability of RAs?

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